



**UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK**

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**A study of the views and experiences of student's  
transition and the role of the guidance counsellor  
with two post-primary schools**

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**Master of Arts in Guidance Counselling and  
Lifespan Development**

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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

A study of the views and experiences of student's transition and the role of the  
guidance counsellor with two post-primary schools

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# Declaration

The author hereby affirms that this dissertation is entirely her own work. No component of the work described in this dissertation has been submitted previously for any reward of degree in the University of Limerick or that in any other institution

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

A fundamental aim of this research is to undertake a study exploring the views and experiences of student's transition and the role of the guidance counsellor with two schools. This research aims to establish what are the initial experiences and challenges in the student's transition and the student's views on the role of the guidance counsellor in their transition. Additionally, the researcher will explore the role of the guidance counsellor in the transition process from the perspective of the guidance counsellor.

From a research perspective, internationally much of the research that exist centres around the area of school transfer and transition programmes (Hanewald 2013, Tudge et al 2009 and Rice et al 2011). The main body of research in relation to transition in Ireland is conducted by Smyth (2017) and Smyth et al (2004).

This study provides and insight into the views and experience of current 2<sup>nd</sup> year students looking back on their transition experience in 1<sup>st</sup> year. The data collection involved the use of surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. A number of themes emerged from this study and the conclusions of this research highlight that the transition experience is mainly a positive one. However, greater clarification of guidance counsellor's role is required for junior cycle students. A number of recommendations were generated to inform the practice of guidance counselling going forward.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>DES</b>	Department of Education and Science
<b>UCAS</b>	Universities and Colleges Administrations Service
<b>HEAR</b>	Higher Education Access Route
<b>DARE</b>	Disability Access Route to Education
<b>ZPD</b>	Zone of Proximal Development
<b>MKO</b>	More Knowledgeable Other
<b>DCYA</b>	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<b>NCGE</b>	National Council for Guidance in Education Research
<b>IGC</b>	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
<b>CBA</b>	Classroom Based Assessment
<b>ECA</b>	Extra-Curricular Activities
<b>SNA</b>	Special Needs Assistant
<b>LCA</b>	Leaving Certificate Applied
<b>UCC</b>	University College Cork
<b>CIT</b>	Cork Institute of Technology
<b>DEIS</b>	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
<b>IACP</b>	Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This research explores the views and experiences of students in two schools relating to the transition from primary to post-primary school and the role of the guidance counsellor in this regard. The aim of this research is to establish an understanding of student's transition experience, the role of school supports and the guidance counsellor in the student's transition. Differences between two schools are explored. This chapter will establish an understanding of transition in a post-primary setting and discuss the role of guidance counselling in an Irish context.

### **1.1 Understanding Transition in a Post-Primary Setting**

“Transitions arise from the individual's need to live, cope and participate in different contexts, to face challenges, to take profit from the advantages of the new situation arising from the changes”

(Crafter and Maunder 2012, p.4)

Transition can be anticipated, unanticipated or non-event. The ability of the individual to cope with transition is based on the situation they are in, understanding of one self, the social supports and the coping responses to transition (Schlossberg 2011). Some of these transitions can be successful leading to new learning and a positive change, however, on the other hand they can be “unsettling, difficult and unproductive” (Ecclestone et al 2010, p.2). Within the education system, as the student is making the transition into post-primary education, this coincides with the unique transition from childhood to adulthood into the development stage of adolescence, where social, physical, emotional and cognitive development accompanies the change, (O'Brien 2008, Legters and Kerr 2001). This point is supported by the research of Topping (2011) as transition to post-primary school is seen as a change in a student's location, teachers and curriculum with pre-transition anxieties reduced with the aid of peer support.

### **1.2 Guidance Counselling in the Irish Context**

In 2009, a Department of Education and Science report 'Looking at Guidance in Second-Level Schools' identified that the aim of guidance counselling in post-primary schools is to “enable students to develop vital self-management skills that lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives” (DES 2009, p.3). In Ireland, according to Hayes and Morgan (2011) the approach to guidance counselling is based on a combination of therapeutic counselling derived from the American system and the European system of career guidance.

It is from this approach that Hayes and Morgan (2011) identify the role of the guidance counsellor in five key areas where they are expected to show knowledge and understanding in:

- Practice and theory in personal, social and vocational guidance
- Training and labour market knowledge
- Counselling
- Management of information and resources
- Professional Practice

(Adapted from Hayes and Morgan, 2011)

Guidance counselling in Irish post-primary schools is engaged in many areas that deal with personal, social and educational issues. The guidance counsellor engages in personal and social issues around areas such as anxiety, stress, bullying, relationships and transition difficulties (Hayes and Morgan 2011). In an educational capacity the guidance counsellor works with students issues that vary from subject choice, 3<sup>rd</sup> level and further education progression, UCAS college applications, HEAR and DARE applications, training options and study skills. These educational services provided by the guidance counsellor also reflect another anticipated transition stage for students as they find themselves making the transition from post-primary school into 3<sup>rd</sup> level, further education or the world of work.

The Education Act (1998) sees the approach to guidance as a whole school responsibility with the guidance counsellor playing a broad role in the whole school setting. In light of this point, the reduced time for guidance counsellors as part of the 2011 Budget re-allocation of hours impacted in how guidance counsellors play an effective role in student's transition despite reinstatement of two-thirds of the original hours as part of Budget 2016 and 2017. The distinctive role of the guidance counsellor and the services they provide were hampered as part of the budgetary cuts and in many cases have taken a considerable amount of time to reinstate (Institute of Guidance Counsellors 2016).

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

The researcher's main interest is in the area of the student experience in their post primary transition. The exploration of two schools is made to give richness to the student's voice in recalling their transition but also provides an opportunity to see different practices across schools. A mixed methods approach was adopted through the use of surveys and focus groups to allow the students

the freedom to discuss their experiences while the semi-structured interview offered the opportunity to the participating guidance counsellors to reflect on the student transition experience.

#### **1.4 Focus of the Study**

The study focuses on 2<sup>nd</sup> year student's views and experiences of their transition and the role of the guidance counsellor in two post-primary schools. A reason for this study is derived from the lack of focus on 2<sup>nd</sup> year student's participation in previous national and international research on transition. As much of the research on transition centres around 1<sup>st</sup> year students the researcher found it important to have the study focus on this year group as 2<sup>nd</sup> year is "crucial period for student engagement" (Smyth 2017, p.11). Through the use of a mixed methodology, the study examines the students and the guidance counsellor experience within a number of areas which were derived from existing literature on the subject. Issues that emerged include initial challenges in the transition process, role of school supports and the part played by the guidance counsellor in the student's transition.

#### **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

##### *Chapter 1: Introduction*

This chapter sets out the scene to how the views and experiences of the student's transition and the role of the guidance counsellor with two schools will be explored. In addition, the chapter will examine the role of the guidance counsellor in an Irish context; discuss the methodology applied and the position of the researcher in this research.

##### *Chapter 2: Literature Review*

The literature review will offer a critical exploration of the issues relevant to the research title and research questions by further looking at human development theories associated with adolescence and available international and national research on school transition.

##### *Chapter 3: Methodology*

In this chapter the approach taken to gathering data in the research will be discussed. The literature review and the research questions outline the methodology approach taken in this research. The method of data collection is discussed along with the ethical considerations, validity and reliability in the research.

#### *Chapter 4: Data Findings*

This chapter will discuss the main findings that emerge from leading issues and sub-issues gathered through surveys, student focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

#### *Chapter 5: Discussion*

This chapter will present a discourse of the main themes emerging from the findings.

#### *Chapter 6: Conclusion*

Chapter 6 provides a summary of key findings from this research. The chapter will highlight the strengths and limitations which were met during this research. Recommendations will be made based on the literature review and findings generated in this research.

### **1.6 Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this introduction was to provide an understanding of what transition is and its place in post-primary education. It presented the role of the guidance counsellor in an Irish Educational context and how their position relates to a student's transition. This chapter presented the structural outline of this dissertation. The next chapter will now provide an in-depth examination of relevant literature associated with transition.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The aim of this literature review is to bring about themes relevant to the research title and research questions by further looking at human development theories associated with school transition, available international and national research on school transition. In addition, a review of existing practice that has been undertaken in the area of primary to post-primary school transition will also be discussed. The review of the literature relating to this research covers main indicators or themes that were identified during the research and which underpin the presentation of this research.

These areas are as follows:

- Developmental Stages of Transition
- Theories associated to Transition
- Transition process
- Approaches which support transition

As a teaching professional in a post-primary setting, the researchers own view of the term ‘transition’ is based around the move of an individual student from familiar settings to an unfamiliar environment and how they cope with this change. Literature states that in order to understand the meaning of transition in broad terms, it is important to recognise that throughout the lifespan everyone experiences transitions whether they are anticipated, unanticipated or non-event that can alternate our life paths, plans and goals (Schlossberg 2011). Transition as an idea is a valuable concept with numerous theoretical and day to day meanings with research defining it as the movement from “one state of certainty to another with a period of uncertainty between” (Schilling et al 1988, p.24).

### **2.1 Developmental Stage of Adolescence**

In human psychology, the developmental stage of adolescence is seen as a crucial stage in a young person’s life as a “period of development and gradual transition between childhood and adulthood” (Holt et al 2015, p. 556). Historically, the study of adolescence stems back to the early 1900’s to the work of G. Stanley Hall, where he viewed adolescence to be a time of “storm and stress” (Holt et al 2015, p.557). The idea of storm and stress related to the challenges felt by adolescents in a storm as they are met with expectations from family, society, peers and media. The idea of stress is caused by the demand and responsibilities attached to the features of the storm. A modified perspective of



Hall's work viewed that not all adolescents experience storm and stress during this stage of their lifespan with some adolescents finding this time of their lives to be a positive one (Holt et al 2015). As adolescence can be distinguished as a stage of life in its own right it also finds a place in the lifespan between childhood and adulthood. As part of this period of human development the adolescent is moving from a state of dependence from being part of a family group to independence to being part of a peer group (Mabey and Sorensen 1995). As students face adolescence, they face physical, cognitive, emotional and social development changes which in turn influence their transition experience from primary to post-primary school. When the holistic levels of changes are considered it can be considered as a "spectacular time of change" (O'Brien 2008, p.121). The physical development of the adolescent brings about many physical changes in the form of puberty at a varied rate at which the sensitivity of the adolescent to the physical change can play a role in the transition of the student. The cognitive development of the student at this time is continuously improving as the brain is increasing in activity and the adolescent is engaging in more complex thinking and is handling more information.

In an Irish context, the promotion of wellbeing and health is essential to the emotional development of young people, as the Department of Education and Skills (2013) state that student's wellbeing "will gain in maturity and confidence" (DES 2013, p.12) through the application of transition programmes. The importance of social development and relationships is significant for the adolescent in transition as their time is increasingly spent with their peers during this stage. The next section of this review of literature will discuss the main theories associated with human development and how human developmental changes may influence the views and experiences of the transition of students in post primary education.

## **2.2 Theories associated to Transition**

In order to understand the adolescent as they transition from primary to post-primary school it is worth looking at Erik Erikson's Developmental Theory (1968) and how it can be applied to the student's experiences in their transition from primary to post-primary school. As part of the theory, each psychosocial stage defines a predominant issue or crisis. According to Erikson, the adolescent years start at 12 years of age and in some cases extends to early 20's. The main crisis as identified by Erikson is that of stage 5, "identity versus role confusion" (Boyd and Bee 2012, p.555). During this stage the adolescent sense of identity becomes uncertain as they are changing due to puberty and the mind of the adolescent is in moratorium between childhood and adulthood. While confusion about their exact role and choice of role leads to identity crisis as the adolescent is troubled by their lack of identity, (Boyd and Bee 2012). As adolescents are examining their identities, in how to

blend into their environment, they often do so by adopting different roles as they transition from primary to post-primary school. In addition to the main concepts of Erikson's theory, Doddington et al, (1999) states that as students adjust to their new regimes in the post transitional period, the organisational aspects of schooling combined with the students developmental features are linked to the student's "image of self and self-identity" (Doddington et al 1999, p.29). An extension of Erikson's work is derived from James Marcia's Theory of Identity (1980) where he stated that many young adolescents were "in a stage of identity diffusion or foreclosure and have not experienced an identity crisis" (Holt et al 2015, p.557). However, as with transition, some students will make the transition to post-primary school with ease and without experiencing an identity crisis which in turn may be experienced at a later stage in the lifespan.

The adolescent years are marked by physical changes in the brain and the body as highlighted by the work of Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stages. Recognised as a journey towards autonomy, there is a growing dependency upon friendships and increased presence of school supports in the transition process. This change sees the student moving away from parental dependence as adolescents "need to experiment with attachment and separation" (Lines 2011, p.71). This need to experiment cause adolescents to examine their identity as was suggested by Erikson in his work. Pratt and George (2004) identify that the stress associated with school transition is becoming "more intense when students fail to relinquish their attachments to primary schools" (2004, p.22) leading to difficulties in emotional investment in a new class group and set of school supports.

Relationships, family and a network of friends are important sources of support during the period of transition. These features form the elements of an individual's environment as defined in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979). The theory has influenced adolescence research positioning the child within a nucleus of structures as it examines the interaction between the child and various contexts. The four nested systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner are relevant to school going children and aid research in understanding the transition of students from primary to post-primary school. The micro system illustrates the most direct interaction the student has with parents, friends and teachers. The mesosystem relates to the settings amongst which the direct links of the microsystem occur, for example the student's home environment might affect their transition into post-primary school thus placing the "phenomenon at the level of the mesosystem" (Tudge and Rosa 2013, p.247). The exo-system refers to the external environment that the student does not participate in directly but does affect the student. As part of Bronfenbrenner's theory the macro-

system differs from the other three systems as it embraces the broader context of social institutions and political systems in which all the other systems are included, (Smith et al 2011).

The primary influence of Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1971) is that social interaction plays a central role in human development. Vygotsky saw that the child is "an active constructor of knowledge and understanding" (Smith et al 2011, p.545). The main ideas of Vygotsky's work are Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Scaffolding which is seen as an important concept in education refers to the role the adult who is known as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) models the best learning strategy for the child to learn from. Researchers such as Crafter and Maunder (2012) argue that sociocultural theory is also important in understanding the transitions of students from primary to post-primary school. In the next section, the indicators that inform the transition process will be discussed and how they apply to international and national research on transition from primary to post-primary school.

### **2.3 Transition Process**

This section will discuss the literature associated with the process of student's transition and will establish which exact indicators influence the student's transition experience. In an educational context, the student experience of primary to post-primary transition begins around 12 to 13 years of age. The transition into 1<sup>st</sup> year involves moving from primary school to post-primary school, with exposure to a structured timetable, new subjects and teachers, greater use of textbooks, leaving old friendships behind and forming new friendships. Crump and Slee (2015) indicate that, "the transition from primary school to high school is an important life event and corresponds with a number of other physical, psychological and social developmental changes", (2015, p.14). In addition to this point, there is also a need to pay particular attention to the academic and pedagogical needs of pupils for transition to be successful (Sutherland et al 2010). Overall, Crump and Slee (2015), identify that these changes are multiple, varying and continuous during the transition process.

There have been several international studies completed in the area of school transitions and how the indicators associated with school transition shape the students experiences in post-primary school and beyond. International research on the transition process has found that a gap between the developmental stage of adolescence and the existing school structures in place in schools play a part in the quality of the transition experience and the performance of the pupil as they progress through their educational journey.

In Australia, Hanewald (2013) identifies the experiences of transition of students between primary and post-primary school by exploring the reasons as to how and why school transition is seen as critical and the ways in which school transition can be supported by school supports. Seen as an important stage in the young student's life the research identifies that transition can have positive or negative impacts on the student's transition both academically and socially. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, Hanewald (2013) also makes reference to the developmental stage of adolescence was an important period on the lives of young people.

In the United States, research by Crafter and Maunder (2012) and Tudge et al (2009) on school transitions offer other insights into the American perspective of school transitions otherwise referred to as 'school transfer'. In the backdrop of Bronfenbrenner's sociocultural theory, Tudge et al (2009) reflect on the ways in which students and the relevant school supports negotiate transition. Crafter and Maunder (2012) highlight that school transitions can be understood from the sociocultural perspective in that the student is situated in a wider social and cultural context. Furthermore, Crafter and Maunder (2012) argue that the transition process "is not limited to individuals undertaking changes" (2012, p.18) but also by the important role that supports around them play in the transition process.

In the United Kingdom, research has centred round the voice of the student in the transition process. Rice et al (2011) highlight how the adjustment to a new school environment along with adaption to social and institutional systems affects the wellbeing of the student and could possibly be difficult to negotiate for students. In their research, the majority of student's worries appeared "to be relatively short lived and decline during the first term" (2011, p.245). In addition, Doddington et al (1999) indicates in their research that year 8 of secondary school which is the equivalent of 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the Irish system needed attention, as there was a feeling that students in this year group felt that there was no challenges or exciting academic content in their school work to look forward to and was viewed as by some students in the research as not a very important year. Doddington et al (1999) concluded that year 8 was a pivotal year where students need to be guided into thinking and acting in a strategic manner in relation to their schoolwork and learning and the importance of it in their later education.

In the Irish context, research has emerged on the experiences of student's transition process with Smyth (2016), Darmody (2008) and Smyth et al (2006) all looking at the manner in which students adjust to post primary school both psycho-socially and through the school curriculum. Similarly, as with international research, the Irish research on school transition pays attention to the student

voice. In the Irish context, Smyth (2016) indicates how students in 1<sup>st</sup> year “express a mixture of excitement and anxiety” (2016, p.29) at the initial transition process. However, as the student progresses into 2<sup>nd</sup> year, additional academic and social challenges can occur which would have been sheltered from the student in 1<sup>st</sup> year. As these challenges become more apparent in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, these challenges are found to have “long-lasting effects on subsequent experiences and outcomes” (Smyth 2016, p.34). In addition, 2<sup>nd</sup> year is seen as a “time where students were mostly likely to test boundaries and discipline issues are seen as arising most frequently” (Smyth et al 2006, p.41). As research tends to focus on year groups such as 1<sup>st</sup> year and that of students going into higher education transition studies “cannot give a holistic overview of experiences among second year students” (Smyth et al 2006, p.8).

Research by Smyth (2017) and Lyons et al (2003) state that students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year will have more of a negative experience with the curriculum and learning with students, “drifting or disengaging at this stage and failing to recover ground subsequently” (Smyth 2017, p.11) as second year was viewed by students as an “in-between year” (Smyth 2016, p.34). In relation to the transition process, its presence in Irish education policy is central. Policy documents such as the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 aims to strengthen the existing transition experiences of students. The framework recognises that, “planning for and providing co-ordinated support at key moments of transition can help ensure better outcomes” (DCYA 2014, p.8). In order to achieve the goal of effective transition, this framework policy indicates the Government’s commitment through relevant departments to “bring a stronger focus on effective transitions” (DCYA 2014, p.36). For effective transitions to take place the Government recognises that a better coordination of services and supports is made available to students. In addition to this point, there is further recognition for better collaboration between professional supports and ease of transition between each developmental stage (DCYA 2014).

#### **2.4 Approaches to the Support or the Hindering of Transition**

Transition offers students the promise of an elevated status, independence, greater opportunities for adventure in the certainty that the transition to post primary school will be undertaken by all students yet transition “is a multi-faceted and complex process” (O’Brien 2004, p.10). The transition journey for students can also be a varied one as some students find transition easier than that of other students (Tudge et al 2009). However in some cases there are areas in which transition to post primary school can result in problems such as:

- Student anxiety about transition and the level to which it persists in post primary school

- The short and long term effects of transition on the students motivation, commitment and motivation to school life
- Role of the curriculum and the implications of the curriculum on the students abilities and learning

(Hargreaves et al 1996)

In light of Hargreaves et al (1996) point, any period of transition people rely on resources to respond to matters that arise as change habitually brings about new challenges. Therefore, the role of school supports is important to the understanding of the student's transition. In this section, the school supports of year head, class tutor, subject teacher, and peers will be discussed. In addition, the role of the guidance counsellor will also be examined at this stage.

The year head plays a central role in the support system of a school. As part of their role, the responsibilities the year head varies and involves collaboration with other members of the school support system. Monitoring the academic and disciplinary performances of the students, the year head is considered to be the one of the most important personnel in the student's transition for support and a source of information (Smyth et al 2004).

The responsibilities of the year head range from,

- Work with teachers in collating information in relation to issues particular students have
- Feedback information to individual staff on particular students
- Communicate regularly with parents/guardians
- Liaise with class teacher, guidance counsellor and school management
- Monitor and support individual students

(Department of Education and Skills 2014)

In many cases the class tutor has the most contact with students in transition as they are seen to have more day to day contact with the students. According to the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (2013), the class tutor voluntarily undertakes the promotion of pastoral care of the class group, promoting classroom spirit and learning to the entire group along with instilling responsibility to the class group. Another key role of the class tutor is to take an individual interest in the students in their group with particular reference to problems that they may have. In many cases if there are problems with individual students the class tutor normally issues a referral to the year head outlining the nature of the issue the student may have (DES 2014).

As students transition into post primary school, they need time to adjust to variety of new subjects and teachers as well as their teaching methodologies. The subject teacher plays an informal role in the provision of support and assistance in the student's transition. Their role is pivotal to the transition of the student and the school transition programme (Smyth et al 2004). During the transition stage the nature of the relationship between the student and the teacher can change having an effect on the student's commitment to their school work, success academically, their level of discipline and overall wellbeing (Banks and Smyth 2015). An argument for this point may lie with the increase in class numbers and timetable demands in that students fail to gain an attachment to the teacher something they made have had with their primary school teacher (Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008). Academically, the subject teacher is best placed to advise the students when they are selecting subjects and levels for their junior cycle.

The transition to post-primary school may bring with it a change in the circle of friends a student has. The age of adolescence that the student is at is important as the peer group plays a more prominent role than other groups in the transition (Gutman and Midgley 2000). As students enter post-primary school the re-negotiation of peer relationships occurs for many with female students taking more time than males to adjust to new peer friendships, (Smyth et al 2004). In addition, it is said that many students spend a considerable amount of their 1<sup>st</sup> year developing their social networks through school, extra-curricular activities and broader community groups (Smyth et al 2004). Transition difficulties may arise for students if they happen to fall in with peer groups who have an anti-school work ethic (Demetriou et al 2000). Another factor associated to peer relationships in the transition process is that of anxiety and concerns around bullying and experiences of isolation which might be seen as an obstacle to the transition process of the student (Smyth et al 2004).

The role of the guidance counsellor is broadly acknowledged within the education system with the NCGE (2004) widely recognising that the guidance counsellor is an essential part of the learning experience of the student in an inter-connected manner both in a personal, social, educational and vocational. In addition, the activities provided by the guidance counsellor assist and support students to make transitions. A 2009 Department of Education and Science report 'Looking at Guidance' stated that the "role of the guidance counsellor is clearly of central importance" (DES 2009, p.10) in assisting the transition of pupils from primary to post-primary school. The Education Act (1998) Section 9a identified that "the early years of second level education are critically important ones for young people" (Government of Ireland 2008, p.16). Furthermore, the role of the guidance counsellor is significant in creating links between the primary and post-primary school in

creating a “smooth transition of students to second level school” (DES 2009, p.14). As transition may be successful for some students it is also worth pointing out as part of the role of the guidance counsellor that “some students may need individual help and possibly counselling in order to complete this transition successfully” (DES 2009, p.14). Therefore this research will look to investigate where the students place the role of the guidance counsellor in their transition to post-primary school as the personal journey of the students has its own, “culture, systems and sets of demands and expectations” (O’Brien 2004, p.4). Research by Smyth et al (2006) identified that many schools involve the guidance counsellor or the chaplain as a support for second year students behind that of the year head/class tutor support system as the main support to students. The role of the guidance counsellor in this case was by means of referral when the year head or class tutor felt they could not deal with the problems of a student themselves.

Guidance Counsellors can support students to deal with non-academic problems of emotional and personal problems. Students can benefit from the opportunities to discuss issues associated with the transition process, (Hargreaves et al 1996). In addition, guidance counsellors can help adolescents to “remedy their weaknesses and develop their strengths without being stigmatised, labelled or separated from their peers through isolated, individual programmes” (1996, p.61). Although guidance counsellors who are often responsible for the co-ordination of such transition programmes, principals, year heads, teachers, parents and students themselves all have the potential to contribute to an increased understanding and smooth adaption from primary school to post primary school. The benefits of some of the guidance counsellor’s supports to students in the process of transition can enhance the students learning as highlighted by Kidd (2006)

- Students are given tools in how to cope with psychological problems which might affect them in their academic work. Therefore students learn to develop skills on problem solving which can help them manage issues impacting their lives.
- Guidance counsellors give students advice on how to manage different situations facing them in the school environment.
- Students who are given guidance and counselled in a manner helpful to them will have a tendency to know what to do and the awareness of how to do such things.
- Students learn how to cooperate with members of the school community. In doing so they learn how to appreciate the supports of the people around them in the school environment.

(Kidd 2006)



## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

It is apparent that from this literature review that student's transition from primary to post-primary school is a multifaceted one coming with many challenges. The aim of this research was to bring about the emergence of themes associated with transition. The review included an exploration of theories associated with adolescence. Additionally, the literature review examined international and Irish research in the area of school transition and the experiences of students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year based on previous research. Finally the review explored what role school supports play in the student's transition with particular reference to the role of the guidance counsellor.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The research aims to discover and give an insight into student's views and experiences of their transition from primary to post-primary school and the role of the guidance counsellor in this transition. This study was conducted with students and guidance counsellors with two post-primary schools. This chapter will begin by discussing the research methodology applied in this research. In addition, this chapter will discuss the approaches undertaken to collect the data in this research and the relevant advantages and disadvantages associated with the selected methods. Furthermore, data analysis, validity and reliability issues, ethical considerations associated with this study will also form part of this chapter discussion.

### **3.1 Research Aim and Questions**

The aim of this research is to explore the views and experiences of 2<sup>nd</sup> year students in the transition from primary to post-primary school and the role of the guidance counsellor in this transition across two post-primary schools.

The overall research questions of this project are:

- What are the experiences of second year students in relation to transition from primary to post-primary school across two schools?
- What school supports the student's transition from primary school to post-primary school from the perspective of students and the Guidance Counsellor across two schools?
- What role does the Guidance Counsellor play in the transition of students from primary to post-primary school?
- What school differences emerged in relation to students' experiences of transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of students and the Guidance Counsellor?

### **3.2 Research Paradigms**

Different research areas, styles and approaches use different methods of collecting data (Bell 2010). According to Cohen et al (2011) and Mertens (1998) research paradigms are a network of models, ideas and framework concepts. This network guides the researcher in the organisation of their thinking, views, beliefs and actions in a logical manner and thus informs their research design. In the area of guidance counselling, the majority of research uses a qualitative paradigm (Sampson et al 2014). In general, qualitative methods in research have gained increased attention in recent times

although methods in quantitative research remain dominant (Sted et al 2012). As previous research in this area by Smyth (2016), Hanewald (2013), Darmody (2008) and Galton et al (1999) used a mixed methods approach. Therefore, the researcher chose to follow this approach in order to draw out the similarities and differences of the views and the experiences of the transition process.

### **3.3 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research uses unstructured and non-numerical data and has research questions and methods which at the beginning of research are general in approach but become more focused as the research progresses (Punch 2005). The qualitative approach to research is also referred to as ‘interpretivist’ research with emphasis on exploration of data in detail encouraging researchers “to rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis and draw on diverse designs” (Creswell 2014, p.232). In terms of this research it meant that the researcher is encouraged to reflect on their role in the research in how they were going to source, record and analyse the data in an accurate manner.

There are a number of strengths associated with the use of qualitative research methods according to Denscombe (2010). The rich and detailed data focuses in on a small scale with detailed descriptions which contributes well to research that has complex social situations. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are interested in participant’s views and experiences as they can perceive the world from the understanding of the participant. Therefore, the results generated from qualitative research are “grounded in reality” (Denscombe 2010, p.319). Furthermore, as qualitative research draws on interpretive character of the researcher, it allows for the possibility of having more than one conclusion in the researchers work. Qualitative research accepts contradictions and ambiguities as a reflection of the social context being investigated (Creswell 2014).

As qualitative research offers a rich insight into real life situations the data generated in the research, it may be difficult to generalise the findings to other situations. As the researcher’s own identity, beliefs and background have a role to play in the formation and analysis of data, the research is operating on the views of the researcher (Punch 2005). In addition, analysis of qualitative research may take longer to collect and in some cases analysis of qualitative data is at a danger of being oversimplified and the findings can force the researcher to fit the findings into themes (Denscombe 2010).

### **3.4 Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research focuses on the gathering of data which is numerical in nature and gives the researcher the opportunity to generalise the data across groups. Quantitative researchers are attracted to discovering facts relating to a topic of interest and possible links between the variables in the quantitative research. The quantitative approach to research has two distinct advantages, (Choy 2014). The first strength of the approach is that it can be administered to participants and evaluated by the researcher all in a short space of time. Secondly the data gathered can allow for comparisons between results and determines the extent to which respondents agree or disagree on points in the research. Limitations associated with quantitative research include that human perceptions, beliefs and identities may give a false impression. As effective quantitative research usually requires a large sample size, the potential lack of human resources makes large scale research difficult to carry out (Dudwick et al 2006). Furthermore, quantitative data fails to describe an in-depth experience of a participant.

### **3.5 Mixed Methodology Research**

In research there are always options and alternatives available to researchers (Denscombe 2010). The type of research undertaken by researchers dictates the kind of research methodologies, the researcher wishes to underpin in their work in order to collect data to answer their research questions. Creswell (2003) defines mixed methods research as

“the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research”

(Creswell 2003:165)

In light of this definition, Basit (2010) identified that the mixed methodology approach enables researchers to undertake “large-scale surveys or experiments to gather and analyse generalizable data followed by in-depth investigation of a smaller number of issues with a smaller proportion of participants” (2010 p.17). The rise in the use of mixed methods research has increased in recent years with commentators such as, Johnson et al (2007) and Denscombe (2010) suggesting that its research status is that of a third methodological movement. Characteristics of the mixed methods approach recognise that the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches occur within a single study.

The mixed methods approach sees beyond the individual characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research and instead explicitly focuses on the link between both quantitative and

qualitative approaches. Triangulation is applied to research to justify the use of “two or more methods of data collection” (Cohen et al 2011, p.195). A characteristic of triangulation is that it allows the researcher to identify aspects of the research topic in a more exact manner by approaching it from different vantage points by using a combination of different techniques and methods as well as being knowledgeable on the strengths and weaknesses associated with each method.

As highlighted above in the research paradigm the mixed methods approach uses methods that originate from different epistemologies in the hope that their use will produce findings that will be of a practical importance for addressing the research questions. According to Yin (2006) the advantages of the mixed method approach appear to be stronger in the use and integration in a single study therefore providing a greater benefit to the overall research topic. Mixed methods research brings with it many advantages in its use as the strengths of the research offset the weaknesses of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods individually. In addition, the approach provides a more comprehensive and complete understanding of the research rather than the quantitative or qualitative approaches alone. Finally the approach helps researchers explain their findings in a rich manner.

The disadvantages associated with mixed methods research must also be considered to give a balanced view on the use of the mixed methods approach. The research design applied by the researcher can be complex. In addition, the approach requires more time to plan and execute this research type and the difficulties may arise where it is difficult to implement one method and draw on the findings of the alternative methods in the research design. Finally, it may be difficult to resolve any discrepancies that may arise when the researcher is interpreting their findings. While there are evident benefits to the use of mixed methods research there are also several limitations associated with the mixed methods approach. There are time constraints associated with quantifying qualitative data causing researchers to reduce sample size and to limit time in interviewing participants, (Driscoll et al 2007). According to Denscombe (2010) the researcher needs to have the acquired skills set of both method. There can be an added demand on the researcher to develop and practice skills associated with both methods therefore missing the essentials of each individual method.

### 3.6 Research Methods

This part of this chapter will discuss the application of surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews as the chosen research methods for this research.

#### 3.6.1 Surveys

Surveys are a list of written questions asked directly to participants which can gather information about matters concerned with the research. Considerations for the use of surveys include planning, question development, piloting of questions and evaluation. The researcher must also consider the types of questions they are going to use whether they are going to use open, closed or a combination of both. In addition, the wording, order and analysis approach must be considered by the researcher. The following table represents the advantages and disadvantages associated with surveys:

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Questionnaires are economical	Pre coded question can be frustrating for respondents and thus deter them from answering
Pre-coded answers	
Relatively easy to arrange	Pre coded questions can bias the findings towards the researcher's rather than the respondents way of seeing things
Data Accuracy	
Supply standardised answers	Questionnaires offer little opportunity for the research to check the truthfulness of the answers given by respondents

**Table 3.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Surveys**

(Adapted from Denscombe 2010, p.169-170)

In view of the table presented, the advantages of surveys indicate the access to reliable information in an easy and relative cost effective manner, however, researchers are reminded that when undertaking surveys to keep the disadvantages in mind and act accordingly to them (Kelley et al 2003). The surveys were conducted with 65 2<sup>nd</sup> year students between two post-primary schools which consisted of 39 females and 26 males and were randomly selected for the survey questionnaire. The surveys were conducted to gain an insight into how the students viewed their own transition into post-primary under a variety of themes. These surveys were administered by the researcher to the participating students. In addition, the surveys aimed to examine the similarities and differences the students faced in their transition in the two post-primary schools. The surveys were analysed using a thematic approach, through the means of thematic mapping and coding (Thomas 2013).

Following the completion of the survey, the processing of the findings occurred through the method of “editing” (Cohen et al 2011, p.348). The three central tasks associated with editing identified as completeness, accuracy and uniformity ensured that the survey questionnaire secured a high response rate per question and the thematic mapping and coding was valid and reliable. In this section of the quantitative research the main task associated with the data analysis was coding. The coding occurred after the survey had been administered and answered by the participating students and was used on the closed questions asked in the survey. The use of open ended questions in the survey invited, “honest, personal comment from respondents in addition to ticking numbers and boxes” (Cohen et al 2011, p.330). Open ended questions were employed on the chance that responses would have adequate information that otherwise may not have been generated in the answers of the closed questions. The use of the open ended questions provided the opportunity for the researcher to identify comparisons and contrasts between the respondents in the two post-primary schools.

### **3.6.2 Focus Groups**

Focus groups are “group interviews that rely, not on a question-and-answer format of interview but on the interaction within the group” (Mertens 1998, p.174). In this research, it is assumed that the participants have a shared experience of the transition process and the intention of the use of the focus group is that participants “will interact with each other, will be willing to listen to all views, perhaps to reach a consensus about some aspects of the topic or to disagree about others, (Bell 2010, p.166). Focus groups may be brought together by the researcher in the hope that the researcher will become less of an interviewer and more of an observer of the group who is there to facilitate the in-depth discussion. The amount of participants in a focus group varies amongst researchers with Morgan (1988) suggesting between 4 and 12 participants, while Fowler (2009) suggests the participation to be between 6 and 8 people with a need to over-recruit by about 20%. In terms of data collection the focus groups took place on each school site two weeks after the survey had taken place.

### **3.6.3 Advantages of Focus Groups**

- Do not discriminate against students who may have literacy and numeracy problems
- Students who may be reluctant to be interviewed on their own to will be more encouraged to be interviewed in a group

- Encourages students to develop their own analysis as they share their experiences common with others in the focus group

Kitzinger (1995)

#### **3.6.4 Disadvantages of Focus Groups**

- The characteristics of group norms may silence the voices of individual members of the group
- Confidentiality of the group is compromised
- Group dynamics may raise ethical issues

Kitzinger (1995)

#### **3.6.5 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are comprised of pre-determined questions but the order of the interview can be modified based on what the interviewer views appropriate. In the semi-structured interview, the interviewer can change the wording of the questions, give explanations and include or omit questions as they see fit, allowing for flexibility to occur in the interview (Cohen and Crabtree 2006). Semi structured interviews are purposeful for exploring the views of the interviewee towards a particular issue. In terms of data collection the semi-structured interviews took place with the guidance counsellors shortly after the focus group work was completed.

#### **3.6.6 Advantages of Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews are seen as well suited for exploring attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives with non-verbal indicators that assist in evaluating truthfulness/validity of the research. A semi-structured interview facilitates getting every question answered and ensures that the respondent has contributed. Semi-structured interviews can potentially increase response rate of the participants, (Van Teilingen 2014).

#### **3.6.7 Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews**

Equivalence of meaning difficulties may arise in the research with a preferred social response wanted from the researcher. There is the situation of non-response/particular groups being unrepresented. In addition there is a possibility of invasion of privacy along with prejudices, stereotypes, appearances and/or perceptions of researcher may alter response, (Van Teilingen 2014).



### **3.7 Data Collection**

As the researcher had easy access to the two sample schools convenience sampling was selected by “choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained” (Cohen et al 2000, p.102). As the researcher has easy access to the two study schools it was of ethical importance that no student of whom the researcher taught in a professional capacity was included in the sample. Two post-primary schools were chosen as the study schools for this research in order to gain richer, comparative findings on students experiences with transition. The gatekeepers of both schools were the school principals. Upon receiving approval from the University of Limerick’s Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2018, the researcher sent information forms (Appendix D) and consent forms (Appendix I) to the principals of both schools. Once permission was granted the researcher gained access to the second year students through their respective year heads and distributed a parental information (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix H) and a student participation information sheet (Appendix A) which set out the purpose and steps involved in the research as “prospective participants must be informed about the research and their formal consent to participate must be obtained” (Tuckman and Harper 2012, p.12).

In both schools 65 students took part in the survey in April 2018 (Appendix J). After this, the researcher invited students to take part in the focus group activity (Appendix K) and a simple random sample was applied in the case of both schools. As more than 6 students wanted to volunteer for the focus group, the students were asked to write their names on their survey after completing it. The researcher picked 6 students names randomly to part-take in the focus group. The audio recorded focus group took place in classrooms in the participating schools where the participating students shared their views and experiences of their transition. The researcher issued consent forms to the parents/guardians of the students to inform them of when the focus group was to be conducted. The researcher accessed the guidance counsellors in both schools through the permission of the school principals. The researcher distributed a subject information letter (Appendix E) and a consent form (Appendix G) to the guidance counsellors to take part in a semi-structured interview on the school sites at their convenience. The semi-structured interview (Appendix L) took place in the guidance counsellors offices in both schools where they shared their views and experiences on student transition to post-primary school. The researcher also put in place supports of the school’s guidance counsellor should any of the participating students get upset at any part of the research.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

“Mixed methods data analysis involves the processes whereby quantitative and qualitative data analysis strategies are combined, connected or integrated in research studies” (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009, p.263). Both quantitative and qualitative data needs to be analysed in order to understand the information that is being conveyed from the data, (Basit 2010). The types of data analysis include: parallel, conversion, sequential, multilevel and fully integrated, (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009). In this research, the researcher decided to adopt an explanatory sequential approach to the data analysis. Sequential data collection analysis occurs when quantitative and qualitative approaches occur in consecutive pattern. In the case of this research the collection of quantitative data occurred firstly with the distribution of the survey. Following on from this the qualitative data of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews was then conducted as a follow up to the quantitative data.

### **3.9 Validity and Reliability**

This section will examine the trustworthiness and validity of this research. Trustworthiness of research refers to the high quality status of the research, therefore when collecting information it must be examined critically to evaluate to what extent the research is likely to be reliable and valid, (Bell 2010). Therefore, valid research is “plausible, credible, trustworthy and defensible” (Johnson and Christensen 2000, p.207). Originating in a positivist tradition, validity states that “the research actually measures or describes the phenomena it set out to measure or describes” (Basit 2010, p.63). Therefore these points indicate that the research must be legitimate. Validity in mixed methods research must conform to its own requirements as qualitative and quantitative methods conform to their own validity requirements. To ensure validity of the research, it is critical during the research design stage that the researcher minimises the threats to the design. Reliability in research describes the “dependability, consistency and replicability overtime, over instruments and over groups of respondents” (Cohen et al 2011, p.199). Reliable research is a precondition to validity, as stated by Basit (2010), as “research which is valid is always reliable” (2010 p.69). However, research which is reliable may not necessarily be valid. Therefore for research to be reliable it ought to demonstrate similar results with a similar group of respondents in similar setting. In the setting of this research the questionnaire was piloted with a group of students as it was of a paramount importance to the researcher to increase the reliability of the research and to ensure that the research was successful.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

In the study of ethics, all responsible researchers abide by a legal code and they conform to ethical guidelines when conducting research. In this research, the researcher is bound by the ethical principles as laid out by the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (IGC) Code of Ethics (2012) and the National Council for Guidance in Education Research (NCGE) (2012). In addition, the researcher was borne by the duty of care to the participants in this research as required by these associations. The purpose of ethical guidelines is to “encourage responsible research practices and assure the protection of human research participants” (Suter 2006, p.79). Ethical practice in general refers to the issues and dilemmas that arise out the development of research. Ethical concerns that have been encountered in some cases of educational research are identified as “extremely complex and subtle” (Cohen et al 2000, p.49), thus placing the researcher in an unwanted predicament. The role of researchers is two-fold as the “ethical obligations a researcher has towards a research participant in terms of interacting with him or her in a humane, non-exploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one’s role as researcher” (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p.264).

Prior to the carrying out of research and to protect all participants taking part in the research from any harm, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) indicate that there are two main ethical dimensions that ought to be considered in all forms of research being conducted. The first of these considerations involves a request by the researcher to an ethics committee to gain permission to conduct the research proposed by the researcher. In addition the second of these considerations is relating to everyday ethical issues that potentially arise in the course of the actual research investigation, (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). As a matter of ethical practice, the researcher was approved full permission to undertake the research by the University of Limerick’s Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2018. To ensure a high standard of ethical practice was undertaken by the researcher the following was applied during the research.

In choosing a research methodology and design awareness of ethical issues associated needs careful consideration at the beginning of the research study and throughout all parts of the research, (Hearne 2013). As mixed methods approach was applied by the researcher there was a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods used that required ethical considerations. Information letters were distributed to all relevant parties in the research in both research schools being the school principals, parents/guardians, students and guidance counsellors. Following on from this, letters of consent were issued to parents/guardians of students interested in participating in the survey questionnaire and subsequently the focus group.

The survey was carried out in a classroom in both survey schools which was private, adequate and quiet area of the primary location. The door of the classrooms in both cases was left open throughout the 40 minutes of the survey. The researcher anticipated potential minimal risks in the research should any emotional issues arise with any of the participants in relation to the questions being asked. The researcher had the school support services available to them to provide support in this issue. Both the student focus groups and guidance counsellor's semi structured interview were audio recorded. The recordings were transferred to a computer that contained an encrypted password and were removed from the recording device with immediate effect at the time of recording. The interviews were then transcribed onto the protected computer. Participants were given a pseudonym and their names were not noted on any documents of the research. The data from the research will then be stored in a secure and safe place for seven years and only after that will the information be destroyed.

As indicated by Hearne (2013) both student and guidance counsellor participants were made aware by the researcher of the questionnaire and interview procedures prior to their participation in the research. As part of the research, the researcher applied a duty of care to each participant as required by the principles of the Institute of Guidance Counsellor's Code of Ethics (2012). The purpose of the research was outlined to all participants undertaking the research. Furthermore, participation in the research was voluntary and confidentiality was maintained throughout. Information sheets also provided information to participants and their parents/guardians that if they wanted to withdraw from the research at any time there were free to do so.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outline the primary aim and research questions that underpin this research. This chapter discussed mixed methods research in terms of quantitative and qualitative data along with the advantages and disadvantages associated with surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Finally, the methodology chapter considered the validity, reliability and ethical issues associated to this study.

## **Chapter 4: Data Findings**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the main findings gathered through surveys, student focus groups and semi-structured interviews. A range of leading themes and sub-themes emerged from the data. The analysed data gave an insight into the unique and individual experiences of student's transition in two post-primary schools.

The following are the overarching themes that were explored in data collected:

- I. Students experiences of transitioning to post-primary school
- II. Role of the school supports in the students transition
- III. Specific role of the guidance counsellor in the school transition from the students perspective

### **4.1 Student's Experiences of Transitioning to Post-Primary School**

The student's experiences of their transition to post-primary school have been divided into themes:

- I. Personal experiences
- II. Academic and Social experiences

#### **4.1.1 Personal Experiences**

The following issues emerged from the findings in relation to students personal experiences of transition

- I. Experiences of starting post-primary school
- II. Settling into school
- III. Challenges in school transition

#### **4.1.2 Experiences of Starting Post-Primary School**

Using a ranking system the personal experience of students in the participating schools on their first day in post-primary school is collated in the following table:

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Experience</b>
1	55%	Nervous/Anxious at being in a new school
2	38%	Looking forward to trying new subjects
3	37%	Excited at being in a new school

**Table 4.1 Experiences of First Day at Post-Primary School**

The personal experience varied between female and male participating students in both schools. When the figures are broken down further the difference between the sexes is that more female participants ranked being nervous as number 1 in comparison to males 33% to 19% respectively. This represented the most selected option for females but the most selected number 1 option for males was feeling ‘excited at being in a new school’ (23%). These findings are further supported by the qualitative focus group that was undertaken in both participating schools. Participating students stated that, *“I was excited for change and the idea of not having to deal with one teacher all day every single day and having you know loads of different teachers that are interested in their subjects so I found that I was really excited for that”* [P1 S1]. In addition students declared that, *“I was really excited for getting the chance to do new subjects like Home Economics and being able to bake but I was very scared leaving primary school”* [P2 S1]. These points were also supported by other participating students in highlighting that they were *“horried coming in”* [P3 S1]. An interesting finding that arose from the research was that 23% of responses ranked ‘missing their primary school teacher’ as their main experience of their first day in post-primary school suggesting the level of attachment to their primary school experiences still existed. This response is further supported by some participants when they said, *“I missed my primary school teacher”* [P1 S2].

(Note: In this discussion **P** represents Participant and **S** represents the School)

#### **4.1.3 Settling into School**

In looking at this data, 52% of the participating student body believed that they had settled into their new school settings by October Mid-Term break with a further 24% settled in by the end of Term 1 in December. Interestingly, 20% of the overall participants surveyed identified that they ‘didn’t know’ and were not able to identify if they had settled in school leading to question whether or not they were still in the transition period. When these findings were broken down into males and females, 46% of male students believed to have been settled into post-primary school by October Mid-Term break whereas 56% of their female counterparts stated the same timeline. In relation to the ‘didn’t know’, males were more likely to indicate that they didn’t know if they had settled in to school. 27% of the participating male students stated this whereas 15% of female students stated this as their answer to the question.

The following table shows the data findings between the participating schools:

<b>Length of Time</b>	<b>School 1 % - Result</b>	<b>School 2 % - Result</b>
Sept-Oct	56%	45%
Oct-Dec	29%	17%
Jan-Mar	2%	0%
Mar-May	0%	4%
Don't know	12%	33%

**Table 4.2 Settling in Period per School**

Differences in the figures from the above table suggest that students in school 1 had settled into school earlier than students in school 2. One reason why students in school 1 may have settled in quicker is the induction day that the school runs. In addition, another reason as to why students in school 1 may have settled in quicker is that each of the students in 1<sup>st</sup> year had a Transition Year student act as a TY Buddy to them in their transition. This is reflected in the following quote by the guidance counsellor in school 1:

*“At the beginning of 1st year we do have an induction day where the 1st year group come in for a half day and they work with their class teacher and year head and the guidance counsellor would meet them as well, the chaplain would come in and talk to them as well and just explain to them who we are and what we do”.*

In addition to the initial transition period the guidance counsellor in school 1 also identified that:

*“Also what helps with the transition is easing them into the school week in September by giving them half days, allow them time to get books in, giving them a TY buddy from our buddy system, it all helps in their settling in period”.*

#### **4.1.4 Challenges in School Transition**

The percentage of ranking here represents the proportion of participating students who placed the following experiences in their top 3 choices:

<b>Rank</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Experience</b>
1	69%	Length of the school day
2	54%	Increase in school work
3	43%	Organisation of lockers, books, resources and timetable

**Table 4.3 Challenges in School Transition**

The findings suggest that organisational and institutional factors represented a major change for the students in their initial transition. This likely impact may also reflect the different organisational and institutional contexts between primary school and post-primary school for the students. These findings are further supported from the semi-structured interview with the Guidance Counsellor from school 1 when they stated that the main challenges students face on transitioning are:

*“numbers, big big numbers, crowds of people, organisation, trying to get around the building, following timetables, getting to grips with all the new books, lockers; it’s a very big change in trying to remember that they need a certain copy for a certain book and class and I would feel that the same for any secondary school not just here but because of the size of our place it will be that bit more to take in for the students”.*

The student experience from both schools also emphasised in great detail their experiences of the challenges in their transition. For example one student indicated the increase in school work and highlighted the length of their school day was a challenge for them:

*“the workload is huge, the teachers not that they don’t have any understanding but a lot of them think that their subject is the only subject and the workload they give you is so high that you are bombarded with it, you finish school at 4 and you are home at half 4 and then you are the whole night trying to get all this work done but then we are told as well to look after ourselves by exercising and you know have all this sleep and be perfect for school then the next day” [P1 S1]*

When the figures from this theme were broken down further according to the participating genders, 21% of participating female student’s equally ranked number 1, the ‘length of the school day’ and the ‘increase in schoolwork’ with participating male students ranking the ‘length of the school day’ as number 1 with 38% stating this option and 19% of male students ranked ‘new teachers’ as their number 2 in their top 3 of rankings. Differences emerged between the two schools in relation to the challenges students experienced when transitioning. While students in both schools ranked the ‘length of the school day’ as their main challenge, students in school 2 were more likely to identify ‘getting to know a new teacher’ as their main challenge in comparison to students in school 1 (33% in school 2 in comparison to 5% in school 1). Students in school 2 felt, for example that *“I found getting used to all different teachers a bit of getting used to because we now had 9-10 teachers and new subjects”.*



## 4.2 Academic and Social Experiences

Amongst the academic experiences of the participating students the following themes arose from an open ended questioning approach:

- I. Increase in school and homework in 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- II. Influence of Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments

### 4.2.1 Increase in Schoolwork and Homework in 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

In general, as student's progress from 1<sup>st</sup> year into 2<sup>nd</sup> year an increase in the engagement of schoolwork and homework occurs in the post-primary curriculum. As the participating students progressed into 2<sup>nd</sup> year, many of the student's experienced a different type of transition to that of the one they had experienced in 1<sup>st</sup> year. Many of the students reported a noted increase in the work from 1<sup>st</sup> year while other students noticed how teachers had become stricter in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. In open ended responses one student identified an *"increase in school work"*, [P3 S1] as their main academic experience. In addition, another participant stated that there was *"more work and it was harder"*, [P7 S1] while another student said that *"teachers gave more work and they have become stricter"* [P17 S1]. Similar feedback to this question came from the participating 2<sup>nd</sup> year students in school 2 where one student indicated that there was *"too much homework I'd rather hang out with my friends"*, [P7 S2] while another student stated that *"teachers are at us too much"*, [P6 S2] with another student simply stating that the academic difference between 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year was that *"2<sup>nd</sup> year is much harder"* [P3 S2].

The interaction of teachers plays a role in a student's transition from primary to post-primary school; however, an interesting point that emerged from school 2 focus group was the change that the participating student's noticed in the teachers approach from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 2<sup>nd</sup> year. In school 2, the students were aware of this difference:

**Researcher: Would you notice the difference between 1st year and 2nd year?**

Nicole: *Yeah, you're not the youngest in the school anymore*

Mark: *Teachers change*

**Researcher: In what way Mark?**

Mark: *They were nice at the start and now they are not*

Kelly: *But even I think that like even in 1st year we were babied, because now in 2nd year looking back on 1st year we don't get the same treatment*

Student’s level of motivation was could be a contributing factor towards their views of second year. The percentage of students who ranked their motivation to academic work shows that, 26% of student’s stated they had ‘very little’ motivation to do academic work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year followed by 23% of students indicating ‘somewhat’ motivated to do academic work with 24% of participants stating they were motivated ‘a lot’ to work. When the findings were broken down further into the different genders, females appeared to have lower motivation than males with 28% of females reporting they had very little motivation in comparison to 23% of their male counterparts. An interesting contrast is that males reported a higher level of motivation than female respondents: 31% of males stated that they were motivated ‘a lot’ to work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year as opposed to 19% of females stating the same point.

<b>Motivation Rank</b>	<b>School 1 %</b>	<b>School 2 %</b>
Very little	23%	30%
A little	14%	25%
Somewhat	26%	16%
A lot	23%	25%
Avery great deal	8%	4%
No opinion	3%	0%
Other	3%	0%

**Table 4.4 Motivation to do Academic Work in 2<sup>nd</sup> Year per School**

#### **4.2.2 Influence of Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments**

An interesting theme that arose in the academic experiences of the students primarily in school 1 was the increasing influence the new Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments (CBA’s) had on the student’s transition especially in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. 20% of students in school 1 identified that the CBA’s have played a significant role in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. In the focus group in school 1, students brought up the impact the introduction the CBA’s was having on their workload.

In open ended responses [P12 S1] stated that there was *“more pressure on us to do well especially with the extra work in the CBA”*, while [P18 S1] that, *“the difference is that things are much harder and there is more pressure on us to focus and listen especially in CBA subjects”*. In addition to these experiences, [P24 S1] added that, *“the workload with the CBA’s is too much on top of what we already have to do”*, while [P27 S1] stated that there was a *“huge amount of study and I don’t*

like the amount of work we have to do for the CBA”. The recognition of the increased academic demands on the students as they transitioned into 2<sup>nd</sup> year was also apparent in the interview with the guidance counsellor in school 1 when they said, “of course the increased school work and now the introduction of the CBA’s as part of the new junior cycle, and I don’t envy them”.

However in school 2, there was no reference made to the CBA amongst the students in their questionnaires or focus group session. The non-reference to CBA’S by the participants in school 2 was clarified by the semi-structured interview with school 2’s guidance counsellor when they indicated that,

*“the priority of the school is trying to get the literacy and numeracy up and then I am on a progression team that is all about trying to keep them in school to hopefully progress them to further education but not just that it’s about keeping them in school after their junior cert”.*

### 4.3 Social Experiences

Amongst the social experiences of the participating students the following themes emerged:

- I. Changes in students circle of friends
- II. Role of extra-curricular activities
- III. Base classrooms and mixed school environment aiding transition

#### 4.3.1 Changes in Students Circle of Friends

The participating students stated that changes in their social and peer relationships varied between schools. Overall 50% of students identified that their circle of friends had changed ‘very little’, or ‘a little’. An interesting contrast in the findings was that 23% of all participating students identified that their circle of friends had changed ‘a lot’.

	<b>Rank</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Experience</b>
<b>School 1</b>	1	26%	Very little
	2	24%	A lot
<b>School 2</b>	1	38%	A little
	2	20%	A lot

**Table 4.5 Changes in Students Circle of Friends per Participating School**

### **4.3.2 Role of Extracurricular Activities**

Extracurricular activities (ECA) impact on both academic performance and social development (research point). This question was answered by all participants with 66% of the students stating that they did not take part in any ECA's while 34% of the participants indicated that they did take part in activities. When these figures were broken down further into the participating schools, results from school 1 reflect the overall findings with 65% of students stating that they did not take part in any ECA's with the remaining 35% availing of activities. In school 2, the findings increased with 71% of students not participating in any extracurricular activities while the remaining 29% indicated that they took part in activities. When this was explored in more detail in school 2, it was identified that:

#### **Researcher: Are ye involved in extracurricular activities**

*Kelly: They don't really have any activities for us here, like we are doing a show for Mamma Mia outside of school but that has nothing to do with the school*

#### **Researcher: Are any of ye in sports teams in the school?**

*Laura: We don't have any teams in the school*

#### **Researcher: How do you think that impacts on ye in school?**

*Laura: I'd like if there was there was teams in the school so we can take part*

In school 1, student's ECA's included student council, basketball, athletics, camogie, hurling, soccer, gymnastics, and Irish dancing. In school 2, ECA's included soccer and activities called the 'motorbike project' and the 'horse project'. In their semi-structured interview the guidance counsellor in school 2, stated the importance of offering ECA'S to students that experience the activities in their community outside of school;

*"wellbeing is key to that also and a big part of the school is finding other avenues for those children to succeed in where their literacy isn't great so we have small programmes to help in the transition such as 'the horse project' where the traveller students learn about looking after horses properly, how to feed them, how to groom them. We have 'the bike project', so kids that are interested in bikes which a lot are around the area learn the mechanics of bikes, how to dismantle a bike and put it back together".*

### **4.3.3 Base Classrooms and Mixed School Environment Aiding Transition**

A theme that arose from the focus group in school 1 was the formation of base class groups in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. In 1<sup>st</sup> year students would have been divided into base class groups only to be divided into

different base class groups again in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. These changes helped in the social transition as identified by the students in school 1's focus group. [P1 S1] stated that:

*“obviously we were in different groups it was nice because I have gotten so many more friends now that I never would have talked to in 1st year or even from primary school, yes it is a big school but yes there is also the advantage of making more friends, forming new friends”.*

It is worth noting in that theme may have contributed to the contrasting figures presented in the changes in students circle of friends.

In addition, this point formed the development of how the mixed school set up aided in the students transition in both schools. In school 1, the focus group were asked

**Researcher: Do you find being in a mixed school has helped in your transition**

Group: *Yes, most definitely*

Tessa: *It's nice to be in a mixed environment because the boys are very calming and they do bring abit of laughter to the class*

Cillian: *I nearly went to an all-boys school and I just despised the thought of going there because like the school is really into sport and I am no way sporty*

Leon: *My parents wanted to send me to that school as well after 6th class, but after a while my Mum was like I should go to a mixed school because she wanted me to learn how to cooperate better with girls*

Similarly in school 2, the students had similar opinions to that of the students in school 1:

Joanne: *Yeah totally, I get on better with boys anyways, girls can be bitchy to you and I don't like that*

Kelly: *I actually was down to go to an all-girls school before I came here; I kicked up a fuss at home saying that I didn't want to go to the other school*

Mark: *I think socially it helps you having both boys and girls in your class you're not as scared round girls then when you are hanging out outside of school*

**4.4 Role of the School Supports in the Students Transition**

The following themes emerged in relation to the role of school supports;

- I. Role of the Year Head
- II. Role of other supports: SNA
- III. Role of Peers

#### 4.4.1 Role of Year Head

In relation to school supports, participants were asked to rank in order the support that helped them the most to settle into post-primary school. The year head was most likely to be identified as a support with 70% of respondents ranking the year head as number one in their top 3 supports. The second most ranked school support in the top 3 amongst students in both schools was a fellow student with 65%, while the class teacher with 63% was the third most overall ranked support in both schools. When the figures were broken down into the different genders the following supports were identified:

Gender	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3	
Male	74%	Class Teacher	74%	Fellow Student	61%	Year Head
Female	76%	Year Head	59%	Fellow Student	57%	Class Teacher

**Table 4.6 Percentage of Top 3 School Supports selected by Male and Female Students**

To support the data findings, students in the questionnaire responded to open ended questions on what the school supports provided for students in the transition process. In response [P21 S1] stated that the “*year head works very hard to make sure that students are top of everything and are trying their best*”. In addition, the role of the class teacher was also evident where [P23 S1] stated that the “*class teacher is the biggest support to me*”. While [P4 S1] stated that, “*the year head and class teacher are always there to talk with students*”.

To support this analysis, the students in the focus group of school 1 identified the role of their year head as key in their transition:

**Researcher: So just to clarify on your transition thus far it has been the year head that has helped the most?**

Elaine: *Absolutely she has really gone above the call of duty for use she really has done so much for us*

Amy: *Like, last year in 1<sup>st</sup> year she organised a school tour-bonding day for us and we know that the other year groups here don't get that, it really helped us all settle in and if we didn't get that day out I don't know how I would have gotten on in 1<sup>st</sup> year otherwise because it helped me get to know my base class group.*

In addition to this the guidance counsellor in school 1 admitted that the main support role is the year head, “*if you need help you know if they are upset about something to call in but really the year head in 1st year and into 2nd year is the main support*”.

#### **4.4.2 Role of Other Supports - SNA**

In contrast to this, in school 2 there were only 4% of participants who ranked their year head as their main school support. In school 2, the class teacher ranked highest amongst the students opinions with 38% ranking the class teacher in 1<sup>st</sup> rank with the home school liaison officer following closely in 2<sup>nd</sup> position with 33%. This was further evident in the focus group findings from school 2 as the participants identified the role of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) as an important support in their transition.

**Researcher: What about your year head?**

Group: *We don't like our year head!*

**Researcher: Really? Why so**

Nicole: *I never liked him*

Kelly: *Depends on what mood he's in*

**Researcher: If you had to rank the supports then what order would that go in?**

Laura: *I'd say the SNA*

Mark: *I would too*

Kelly: *I think it's a school by school thing everyone here likes the SNA's it may not be the case in another school, they are someone who I would talk to, and I would have no problem in doing that*

Mark: *they have helped us settle down the most in our transition.*

#### **4.4.3 Role of Peers**

Following on from the results of the questionnaire, an interesting theme arose from the focus groups in both schools in relation to how important the role of their peers played in the transition of the participating students. The focus group in school 1 identified the following;

**Researcher: Who has been your main support in your school transition?**

Leon: *Friends*

Elaine: *I would say friends and also our Year Head has been a huge help*

Leon: *Our year head as well she's been great I really like her*

In addition to this point from school 1, students in school 2 had a similar view;

**Researcher: What is the most important aspect of your school transition? Is it Study, Friends, Academia, Social Aspect, Extra Curricular Activities?**

Group: *Friends*

#### 4.5 Specific Role of the Guidance Counsellor in the School Transition

- I. Role of Guidance Counsellor from the guidance counsellors perspective
- II. Role of Guidance Counsellor from the students perspective
- III. Role of Guidance Counsellor in helping students transition

##### 4.5.1 Role of Guidance Counsellor from the Guidance Counsellor's perspective

As an introduction to the semi-structured interviews with the guidance counsellors in the participating schools, the guidance counsellors were invited to explain their role in their respective schools. The guidance counsellor in school 1 perceived that their role was split equally between guidance and counselling, *“I would say half counselling and then half guidance when you count in the careers side of it, skills and options for the students”*. In addition, the guidance counsellor in school 2 perceived their role to be varied with more emphasis on vocational and educational guidance and less counselling,

*“so I am a class teacher to LCA and I teach them VPG-Vocational and Preparation Guidance. I am dealing with mostly senior classes, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year and LCA's a lot because of the VPG module that has a lot of key assignments that they have to do an example would be a community work module, work experience, guidance module”*.

An interesting similarity that both guidance counsellors saw in their work was how much of their time was involved with 6<sup>th</sup> years. The guidance counsellor in school 1 remarked on how their role was *“to work with 6<sup>th</sup> years as we have a lot of numbers in 6<sup>th</sup> year so we spent a lot of time with them as the priority”*. A similar point was made by the guidance counsellor in school 2 where they recognised their role with 6<sup>th</sup> years as, *“I have guidance and careers with the Leaving Certs as a matter of fact you are constantly going with the Leaving Certs.*

Another similarity saw both guidance counsellors sharing their views on the need to work more closely with junior cycle students going forward so that the advice the students get from the guidance counsellors will give them the opportunity to make more informed decisions. The guidance counsellor in school 1 said that,

*“from a career perspective if you can work with them at a young age as to what they would like to do and help them towards it, then at 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> year it won't be as daunting a task then to deal with CAO, points, colleges and so on”*.



A similar view was shared by the guidance counsellor in school 2 in the area of subject choice and decision making,

*“some awareness for students that in earlier years that choosing foundation in junior cert isn't going to do them any favours if they want to go out and get an apprenticeship therefore its key in the younger years they have the availability to that advice too”.*

Differences in the guidance counsellor's role were also identified in the interview with both guidance counsellors. In school 1, the guidance counsellor highlighted their close working relationship with the year head, *“obviously working close with the year heads with any referrals that come in for counselling”*. Whereas the guidance counsellor in school 2 stated their work involved collaborating with *“the school completion unit, home school liaison office and the behavioural support unit”*. In addition, the guidance counsellor in school 2 further indicated the wider groups with whom they also collaborate with, *“working very closely with UCC plus and CIT progression on that front”*.

#### **4.5.2 Role of Guidance Counsellor from the Student's perspective**

The questionnaire asked the participating students their views about the current provision of supports in their schools. The questionnaire identified that none of the students in either school ranked the guidance counsellor as their main support in their transition. Only 3% of students in school 1 ranked the guidance counsellor as a second choice ranking with no students ranking the guidance counsellor from school 2 in any of their top three percentages of rankings. Furthermore, in school 1, the guidance counsellor was only referenced twice by students in their open ended answers where they saw the role of the guidance counsellor was for the purpose of meeting with students. In school 2 there was no reference to the guidance counsellor's provision in the current supports for students. The findings from the questionnaire are in contrast to the perceived role from the participating guidance counsellors as discussed in the previous section.

To further explore the specific role of the guidance counsellor the participating students were asked an open ended question on what the guidance counsellor did for the students in their transition to post-primary school. The feedback to the question was mixed from students in both schools. In school 1, positive themes that arose from the student's feedback included the role the guidance counsellor had played in helping students with anxiety, listening to problems associated with settling into school and issues that had arisen around bullying as 11% of students indicated bullying as their hardest challenge in settling into school 1.

However, the feedback from this open ended question proved to be more negative than positive in the student's findings. Students in both schools found that the presence of the guidance counsellor in their transition was limited and access to their services was difficult to avail of. Many of the student's related their answers back to their own personal experiences of their transition experience. [P16 S1] stated that the guidance counsellor had done "*nothing for me anyways*", while [P22 S1] stated that "*they have done nothing for me*", and [P4 S1] said that "*they talked to us the first day haven't seen them since*". In contrast, [P21 S1] recognised the work of the guidance counsellor by stating that "*although I never use the service I believe they do good work*".

In school 2, students were more aware that they couldn't access the guidance counsellor, as [P8 S2] stated in their feedback that, "*we can't get to the guidance counsellor because she's with the Leaving Certs all the time*". Similar to school 1, students in school 2 related their answers to their own experiences, where [P12 S2] stated that "*our guidance counsellor is also my teacher and was very good to me in helping me start here*". Interestingly, the survey questionnaire also generated new information for students in school 2 participating in the survey questionnaire as [P1 S2] stated in their results that, "*I didn't know we had one until this questionnaire*".

Students in both schools were asked their opinion on what could the guidance counsellor do to help students who may be still experiencing transition issues. In school 1, greater availability was the main theme from the student's feedback, with students stating answers such as "*be more available to talk to*". In addition, that guidance counsellors "*need to be more available*" and that "*more time slots are needed for the junior students*". Furthermore, there were some interesting suggestions to this question from school 1 as students declared that guidance counsellors should carry out "*random meetings, spot checks on students regardless if they are fine or not*", and that the guidance counsellor "*could do more transition/bonding activities*". In school 2, students had similar opinions to that of their counterparts on the theme of greater availability, feedback included, "*be available to talk to, to help with concerns students have, be available to talk to*" and "*be more available to junior students*".

#### **4.5.3 Role of Guidance Counsellor in helping Students Transition**

The guidance counsellor is one of many supports available to students as they transition into post-primary school and progress through the second level curriculum. The level of support offered varies amongst schools, in accordance with school size, numbers of pupils and availability of guidance counsellors. In this research, school 1 is a larger school in size and numbers of pupils than

what school 2 is. In saying that, however, students in both schools expressed similar views in what the guidance counsellor does in helping with student's transition.

In this research, availability of time seems to be a constraint of the guidance counsellor helping students in their transition as stated by the guidance counsellor in school 1:

*“In terms of both years groups I would think it would be the role of the class teacher and the year head, I would love to do more I really would with these year groups but I genuinely just don't have the time”.*

The guidance counsellor in school 2, stressed that they would like to be more present with the students in relation to subject choice and levels as the student's progress through their junior cycle:

*“so I feel that there should have been some awareness for students that in earlier years.... therefore its key in the younger years they have the availability to that advice too”.*

#### **4.6 Chapter Summary**

The findings from the analysis have created thought provoking similarities and contrasts in the research. Students in school 1 settled into school easier and took part in more ECA's provided to them. Students in school 1 stressed that the length of the school day and increased workload in 2<sup>nd</sup> year lead to them calling out for help in how to cope with the increased demands of the new junior cycle. In school 2, students recognised the help of the SNA's and class teachers in their transition, whereas the students in school 1 recognised the support of their year head. The guidance counsellor's role is varied between vocational and personal counselling and they are very much in demand by senior cycle students. Both guidance counsellors wished they could be more involved with the student's transition; however time constraints seemed to be a major issue.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter will present a discussion of the main themes emerging from the findings. Within this chapter the reasons behind these findings will be discussed while comparisons and contrasts with the relevant literature will be made accordingly. The following themes of initial transition experience, academic and social experiences, gender differences, school differences, role of supports and the role of the guidance counsellor in the transition process will be discussed in this chapter.

### **5.1 Initial Transition Experience**

In order to understand the initial transition period that young people experience, Hanewald (2013) defined it in the following manner:

“Transition from primary to post-primary school is seen as an important crossroad as young people move from a small, self-contained classroom to a large, more heterogeneous school with increased expectation of independent academic performance and less teachers”

(Hanewald 2013, p. 64)

In order to elaborate this view on transition the following sub-themes of first day experiences, length of time setting in and challenges associated with transition emerged from the literature illustrating participating student’s initial experiences of transition. The results of this research show that 55% of participating students ranked being ‘nervous/anxious’ in their top 3 concerns at being in a new school, while a further 37% of students ranked ‘excitement at being in a new school’ in their top 3 choices. These findings suggest that students show a mixture of anxiety and excitement in the initial transition into post-primary school (Smyth 2016). This sentiment mirrors research by Darmody (2008) as student experiences associated with the initial transition phase are filled with certain nervousness. These findings suggest a variety of possible reasons as to why students have these feelings on their first day.

Smyth et al (2004) suggest that the socio-economic background of the student plays a role as students from skilled professional backgrounds report more of a positive feeling in contrast to students from an unskilled/semi-skilled background reporting more negative feelings. This view is also shared by Dumais (2002) where students from a middle-upper class background feel more comfortable than students from lower-class background in their new post-primary school environs. The findings suggest that more of the participating students were from an unskilled/semi-skilled

background than that of a skilled professional background. This point could be further supported by the fact that school 2 is located in a socio-economic disadvantaged area.

Another reason for the initial transition experiences is based around the positive role older siblings played in the initial transition process as [P2 S2] stated *“that’s because my brother is in the school and he had me prepared for what to expect”*. This view suggests that students who have an older sibling in school were less likely to report negative feelings about their first day experiences, (Knight 2013). The possibility of this lies with the older sibling having experienced their own transition initially and as a result relays their experiences and knowledge of what to expect to their younger sibling therefore the younger sibling is more equipped with what to expect as they start post-primary school.

From this research, 52% of the participating students believed they had settled into their respective schools by October, with a further 24% participants having settled in by December. These findings are similar in light to previous research where students appeared to have settled into their 1<sup>st</sup> year of post-primary school from as early as October and viewed it to be a positive experience (Darmody 2008). These findings suggest that the participants saw that their transition *“turned out a lot better than what I expected for me anyway”* [P3 S1] which stipulates that as the students became more familiar with their school new environment the easier the initial transition period was for them, (Darmody 2008) as *“transition wasn’t easy but I got used to it in the end”* [P14 S1]. In contrast however, this research identified that 20% of students ‘didn’t know’ when they had settled into post-primary school and this created the possibility that the students may still have been going through the transition process in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. The research findings are similar to research by Evans et al (2010) and Smyth et al (2004) where it is suggested that one in six students take longer than a month to settle into post-primary school. The following points suggest various reasons as to why this may be the case in the context of this research.

The move into post-primary school brings with it many challenges for students with the developmental stage of adolescence seen as a crucial lifespan stage with physical, cognitive, emotional and social development occurring simultaneously. The results of this research highlight that 69% of students identified ‘the length of the school day’ as one of their top 3 challenges associated with transition. As research by Hanewald (2013) and Smyth et al (2004) highlight the further the distance the student has to travel to school contributes to the length of the school day. To further support this finding geographically there are less post-primary schools covering a larger area of settlements therefore travel is required in many cases. This reason appears to be reflected in this

research, where the participating schools are urban schools with a wide rural catchment, so the participating students have longer to travel to school in this context as the guidance counsellor in school 1 stated *“we are a large school we have 1160 which is one of the biggest in the county we have a big catchment area, as a community school, we welcome everybody and everyone”*.

Another challenge with transition was the ‘increase in schoolwork’ as 54% of participants reported this issue in their top 3 of choices with participants suggesting that *“the workload is huge”* [P1 S1]. A combination of a longer school day reinforced with increased levels of homework contributes to a greater workload overall for many students, (Reyes et al 2000). A suggested reason to support this stems from the students facing a stark difference between associated levels of primary and post-primary school as students would have been comfortable with in their primary school setting, having the same teacher every day, less subjects to study, less moving around school and organisation of resources and lockers and having the same friends in class to larger post-primary environment. In light of this point, it was also reported in the findings that 43% of student’s selected as their top 3 choice, the ‘organisation of lockers, books, resources and timetables’ as their main challenge in their transition. As student’s progress through post-primary school it becomes more subject centred towards the end of 1<sup>st</sup> year and into 2<sup>nd</sup> year with different subject teachers requiring different organisational input into their subjects by the students (Stabels 1995). In order to face this challenge, Knight (2013) states that students need to work on developing their organisational skills in homework tasks and in the use of their resources. One would have to question whether sufficient time is afforded these skills in post-primary schooling today

## **5.2 Academic and Social Experiences**

Four issues are discussed with this section these include institutional and organisational challenges, student motivation, role of junior cycle classroom based assessments and influence of peers. In 1<sup>st</sup> year transition experiences revolve around institutional and organisational transition of the student as discussed above. Findings in the current research suggest that the participating students were aware of the increase in academic demands as they progressed from 1st year to 2nd year as *“more work done in class and increased level of homework”* [P6 S1] and students identified that *“2nd year is much harder”* [P3 S2]. Participants in the research also noted an increase in academic demands as *“subjects got harder and my results dropped as a result”* [P14 S1] suggesting that students in 1st year coped with the transition experience as discussed previously and now they were in 2nd year they were required to focus on their work as identified by [P5 S1] *“that no longer we are the furries”* (Furries a name used to describe 1<sup>st</sup> years).

As student's progress into 2<sup>nd</sup> year, evidence of the student's ability to cope with academic demands arise as the findings in this research mirror the research by Smyth (2016) where more negative thoughts of student's abilities to cope with the workload becomes more evident. The lack of a state exam at the end of the year and the stage of adolescence that the students are in becomes more prevalent at this time (Smyth 2016). In terms of this research, students noted the role of the impending junior cert as [P9 S1] stated that there was "*more work and stress around junior cert*" rather than focusing on the immediate task of completing 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

In the literature review, it was noted that students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year 'dip' in motivation and findings in this research varied on this view. Findings in this research show that 53% of respondents stated that there was 'very little' motivation to do academic work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year which was in contrast to the 48% of respondents stating they were motivated 'a lot' to do academic work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. These figure suggest that 2<sup>nd</sup> year is a key time for student disengagement from school and teachers as students develop a negative academic self-image of themselves while interactions with subject teachers and their teaching methodologies contribute to these findings also, (Smyth 2016). With 53% of the participants showing 'very little' motivation in this research it confirms what was suggested in research that the students noticed a change in their teachers from 1<sup>st</sup> year, with participants stating that "*teachers give more work and they have become stricter*" [P10 S1] and that they saw teachers giving "*less help*" [P2 S1]. There is a suggestion in previous research that students in 1st year receive more positive affirmation from their teachers as part of the transition process and as they progress into 2<sup>nd</sup> year that was least frequent with an increase in student behaviour in specific classes (Smyth 2017). Previous research by Dumais (2002) suggests this affirmation is down to the cultural capital the teacher possesses. The more cultural capital the teacher has the greater tendency they have to reward students who possess cultural capital. Students who have more cultural capital having been raised in middle and upper class backgrounds are therefore more comfortable in school academically and communicate well with their teachers and are affirmed as a result whereas lower class students lack the capital needed to fit into school environment despite their teachers possessing cultural capital.

The emergence of the new Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments (CBA's) in the data findings suggests that the assessments were playing a role in the student's progression in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Introduced as part of the new Junior Cycle reform in 2015 the CBA's are seen to be not an extension of a student's existing workload but rather as an integral part of the teaching and learning process that normally takes place in the student's academic work (DOE 2017). In school 1, students highlighted their concerns the role the CBA's was placing on their academic workload and the additional efforts

required of them as a result suggesting that the CBA's were indeed an extension of the student's existing workload. A point recognised in the findings by the guidance counsellor in school 1 where they stated "*the increased school work and now the introduction of the CBA's as part of the JCT, I don't envy them*" suggest that the CBA's are an extension of the students existing workload. Evidence from the analysis showed that, students in school 1 were aware of the introduction of CBA's with students in school 2 making no reference to the CBA's. As the CBA's are being rolled out over a phased basis, the subjects at the time of the data collection being assessed were English, Business Studies and Science This is not to say that the students in school 2 were not aware of the low key assessment the CBA's play in 2<sup>nd</sup> year in English as a core subject. School 2 offer Business Studies and Science as option subjects and therefore, one can only presume that in the context of this research the students in the focus group may not have been studying these subjects in 2<sup>nd</sup> year.

The role of peers in the transition process played a vital role in this research. Over half the participants stated that their circle of friends had changed 'very little' during the transition process suggesting that the student friendships were settled. In contrast nearly a quarter of students stated that their circle of friends had changed 'a lot' in their transition. The focus groups revealed that student's drew on support from their peers in their transition and support in transition related themes as [P4 S1] stated "*even when talking to them it's almost like 'oh me too' and you can talk to them like about stuff and that makes you feel better and that you are not alone in this*". A contributing social factor in a student's transition is the role of extra-curricular activities (ECA's) as Darmody (2008) suggests that the social nature and interaction of ECA's provides opportunities of positive social behaviour and increases the social development of students who participate in ECA's. This research showed that two-thirds of the participants did not take part in any ECA's provided to them by their schools. The findings from this research are worrying as the DES (2013) states that students experience a sense of connectedness and belonging in school through their participation in ECA's as ECA's promote positive relationships with teachers and peers. The findings are also concerning as students who engage in school through ECA's and other activities are more likely to achieve more in school thus contributing to their own wellbeing in a positive light (Weare 2000).

### **5.3 Gender Differences in Transition**

The focus of this theme is to consider the challenges in settling in and the academic and social differences between the participating male and female students. In terms of school functioning, 56% of female respondents reported that they had an uncomplicated transition into post-primary school in contrast to the 46% of their male counterparts. This research identified that a higher proportion of



males found it more difficult to function in their initial transition in comparison to the participating females in the options of ‘length of the school day’, ‘increase in school work’ and ‘organisation of lockers, books, resources and timetable’ as the hardest challenges in their initial transition. These research findings are echoed by Hanewald (2013) and Hargreaves and Galton (2002), where the transition period is recognised as a greater challenge for males than females in terms of school functioning. Evidence of the disruptive nature of the transition process in the developmental stage of adolescence is greater in males (O’Brien 2008) as a possible reason to support the findings and previous research. In contrast to this point, Smyth et al (2004) research has suggested that males settle quicker into post-primary school than females. A reason to this point is put forward by Hargreaves and Galton (2002) and O’Brien (2001) where they identify that females articulate more fear than males in the transition to post-primary school. However, in the context of this research, results were similar between the genders as, 56% of females reported at feeling more nervous/anxious in their initial transition while 54% of males felt the same.

Evidence in this research shows the differences in how the participating males and females perceived their academic motivation to be. The findings generated contrasting results with the male participants being ‘more’ motivated to work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year whereas their female counterparts being ‘somewhat’ motivated. These findings, suggest that more females are more likely to face transition difficulties therefore becoming less confident in their learning than their male counterparts, (Smyth 2017). These findings are in contrast to Irish research, where it was reported that male students were more prone to a dip in academic performance in 2<sup>nd</sup> year (Whitby et al 2006). However, in a social context of this research, a higher proportion of female participants than males indicated the significance of their social relationships highlighting that the social relationships that students have, play a significant role in the transition process of the student.

#### **5.4 School Differences to Transition**

The manner in which schools set up and operate can vary according to their needs and requirements. The following sub-themes of differences in settling in, organisational and institutional change, academic and social experiences and role of supports emerged to illustrate the differences between the participating schools. The findings established that a higher proportion of students in school 2 took a longer period of time to settle into post-primary school. Furthermore, students in school 2 also reported a higher percentage than school 1 of ‘don’t know’ as to when they settled into post-primary school. In the context of this research, school 2 is a DEIS school in a community that is at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion. Previous research suggests that student’s

attending DEIS post-primary schools experience the greatest transition difficulties and develop more negative feelings towards their school and teachers (Smyth 2016). However, in the case of school 2 a proportion of students indicated the positive role class tutors had played in supporting them in their transition. This appears to be reflected in the findings students in school 2 found it took much more time to adapt to teachers and new subjects as participating students in the focus group stated that they *“found getting used to all different teachers abit of getting used to because we now had 9-10 teachers and new subjects”* [P2 S2]. To support this reason further, the data from school 2 suggests that it was more complex than this as 30% of the participants ranked missing their primary school teacher in their initial transition experience. While engagement in student mentoring programmes and induction days form an integral part of the transition process for students (Smyth 2004) the guidance counsellors interview in School 2 described the schools focus on other aspects of the student’s progression in accordance with the DEIS criteria, *“our priority as a school is promoting the literacy and numeracy of the students”*.

A higher proportion of students in school 1 settled into post-primary school quicker perhaps due to the school having a well-developed and integrated student transition programmes as recognised by the guidance counsellor, *“at the beginning of 1st year we do have an induction day where the 1st year group come in for a half day and they work with their class teacher and year head and the guidance counsellor would meet them as well”*. The differences in the schools also suggest the social class position of the students in the school settings. As highlighted in theme 1, the cultural capital of the school and furthermore the social location of the school leads the schools to construct different pathways for their students (Lareau 1987) as indicated in the interview with the guidance counsellor in school 2 *“so our priorities may not be about getting them to UCC and CIT, that’s fantastic too and we have some students who have done that but the numbers would be small”*.

Organisational and institutional differences between the participating schools were evident with students in school 1 indicating differences in the physical school environment and the organisation of base classrooms in positive light. In the school 1 students in the focus group stated that [P3 S1] *“It’s such a big building and everyone is ridiculously tall and I’m tiny”* while [P4 S1] highlighted, *“we came over to this school it was so big, it was so huge and I just found it really confusing and I didn’t know what to do”*. Furthermore [P2 S1] stated that, *“it was a really big building with much more students”*. This appears to reflect the point that in the initial transition students are more concerned with organisation and the physical environment of the school rather than the academic requirements (Lahelma and Gordon 1997). However for the students in school 2

this issue did not emerge as a point of concern. In the context of school 1, student's base classes are reorganised in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, whereas in school 2 the students remain in their base groups for the entirety of their junior cycle. The benefits can be seen in a social capacity in school 1 where [P1 S1] stated that *"I have gotten so many more friends now that I never would have talked to in 1st year"*. The students in school 1 looked at this change in a positive light as [P3 S1] summed it up in that there was an *"advantage of making more friends"* and *"forming new friends"*. Similar to the school environment, this point did not emerge in school 2.

Student's opinions on the role of school supports varied from the participating students in both schools. As highlighted by Smyth et al (2004) the year head and the class teacher are thought to be the most important supports for students as they have the most contact with the students directly. This research indicated similar views as the year head played a pivotal role in the student's transition in school 1, whereas the class teacher played the main support for the students of school 2. Many of the students in school 1 identified the importance of the year head and the efforts the year head had gone to, to make their transition experience as smooth as possible for them as [P4 S1] stated *"she has really gone above the call of duty for use she really has done so much for us"* and [P5 S1] *"last year in 1st year she organised a school tour-bonding day for us"* illustrates the key role of the year head in general but also how 54% of the students in school 1 ranked the year head as their main school support.

However, in school 2, the focus group session indicated a less harmonious relationship between the students and the year head is seen as a disciplinarian whereas the class teacher was seen as looking after the interests of the students in pastoral capacity. Furthermore, a strong rapport with the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) was evident in school 2. Previous research states that the role of the SNA is primarily seen in a mainstream setting acting as support to special needs students within the mainstream class setting, (Holmes et al 2013). This research highlights that the students in school 2 saw the role of the SNA in a pastoral setting within the mainstream classroom as [P3 S2] stated that *"I love all the SNA's they are so nice and they are always willing a able to help you and talk to you if you are having a bad day"*.

### **5.5 Role of Supports in the Transition Process**

The findings identified a variety of supports that helped the students in their transition. The year head, class teacher and peers were supports that emerged in the research. As has been highlighted previously in this research, the year head plays a pivotal role in student's transition. The year head

was the most recognised school support in the student's transition with 70% of students identifying the role as a key support in their transition as in many cases they are seen source of support and information for the students, (Smyth et al 2004). As was discussed previously with reference to the year head in school 1, the findings suggest that many induction programmes take central place in the student's transition as they are led by the year head (Smyth et al 2004). This point was further supported by the semi structured interviews with both participating guidance counsellors where they stated that the year head plays a vital role in the induction programme of student's transition.

In school 2 the class teacher was viewed in the findings as the most important school support in the view of the students in the survey. A possible reason to this point is cited by Knight (2013) as the class teacher plays an important role in providing supports academically, emotionally and socially to the students. The class teacher looks after the interests of the students along with addressing issues such as organisation of books, uniforms and school rules. In addition, the class teacher deals with issues relating to bullying and therefore is seen to have more contact time with students than the year head and in many cases is the first port of contact for the student. The class tutor system and induction days are seen as primarily the most important system for integrating students by school principals, (Smyth et al 2004)

In this research peers were also seen to play a key role in the transition journey, as participating students stated how important it was for them to know that their peers were also going through the process was comforting for many of the participants. The students in the participating schools recognised the importance of their peers in the survey and focus group as 65% of students in the survey choose as their top choice that fellow peers played a significant part in their transition. These findings show how important their role was in their transition in a social capacity and the importance of having a familiar face in post primary school adding to the ease the transition process for the student. As discussed previously, in this research induction programmes helps with student inductions and enhances peer support in the transition phase in how students interact with their peers (Smyth et al 2004). Furthermore, the closer the peer relationships are during the transition phases the greater chance a stable and solid friendship will be formed, (Hanewald 2013).

## **5.6 The Role of the Guidance Counsellor in the Transition Process**

Based on what has emerged from previous literature one of the main aims of this research was to establish the role of the guidance counsellor, their role in student transition and their role in the participating schools. In general, the guidance counsellor's role involves the integrated development

of students in an academic, social, emotional and personal capacity (IGC 2012). The findings from the participants in the current study placed the guidance counsellor's role in working with students in senior cycle and therefore a lack of available time to work with junior cycle students as participating students highlighted that *"we can't get to the guidance counsellor because she's with the Leaving Certs all the time"* [P8 S2]. Literature suggests that school policies take different approaches into how the guidance counsellor's role is undertaken, in how many guidance counsellors there are in the school, the percentage of time and meetings allotted to students, (Egan 2014). A 2014 report by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) stated that guidance counsellors faced challenges in providing their services within the school timetable. The semi-structured interviews with the participating guidance counsellors support the literature as they stated that much of their work was occupied by working with senior cycle students, as the guidance counsellor in school 1 stated, *"on reflection a lot of my role here is to work with 6<sup>th</sup> years as we have a lot of numbers in 6<sup>th</sup> year so we spent a lot of time with them as the priority"*. The view of the guidance counsellors in this context support the fact that the Leaving Cert takes over the schooling process and therefore all the emphasis is placed on the last 2 years of schooling hence the guidance counsellor is not available to sufficiently engage with junior cycle students.

The findings echo that many of the students wanted more access to the guidance services and apart from the initial induction period many of the students did not have an opportunity to avail of the guidance services since as stated post-primary school. Many of the students were aware of the presence of the guidance counsellor in the school yet as highlighted by [P4 S1] *"they talked to us the first day haven't seen them since"* illustrating the lack of access to their services. A suggestion from the guidance counsellor in school 1 as to the possible lack of access in junior cycle was that, *"I don't have time to go into them but they don't have time to come into me either because they are going to have to miss a subject to come out and the school wouldn't have that either nor would subject teachers as their timetable is full"*.

In the light of the findings in this research and previous research there is a need for greater communication on what the exact role and the identity of the guidance counsellor is (Bimrose 2006). The students perceived view of the guidance counsellor's role also varied thus suggesting a possible lack of clarity in the role as recognised in research by Mc Coy et al (2006). The semi-structured interviews showed variances in the role of the participating guidance counsellors due to the schools needs and requirements. The lack of clarity between the student's perceptions and what the guidance counsellor does in their role in this research led to the participating students in both

schools not ranking the guidance counsellor highly in their supports in their transition in this research. The findings in this research also showed the work that the Guidance Counsellor has done with the participating students in their transition as the findings showed in an academic, social and personal manner. The participating students outlined topics such as *'bullying'*, *'help with organisation'*, *'subject choice'* and *'listening to problems'* that the guidance counsellors have helped the students with in their transition. These findings portray the many benefits of the guidance counsellor's role that students can avail of during the transition process from the provision of psychological help to advice on managing progression in the school environment help the students cope in the post-primary environment (Kidd 1996)

### **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the main themes that emerged from the literature review and the findings with students in order to obtain their views and experiences of their transition and the role of the guidance counsellor. The research findings from this study indicate that the transition experience was mainly a positive one overall. Beyond this, the findings reported how the participating students perceived their own experiences in a reflective manner as they were afforded the opportunity to look back on their transition in 1<sup>st</sup> year now that they were nearing the end of their education in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. The findings indicate the significance of the transition process for students and the challenges associated with the transition experience and in some cases aspects of the how the transition experience varied between the participating genders and the participating schools. Therefore in saying this, these findings can only speculate on the transition experience of the participating students in the two participating schools.

Students in this study highlighted that their initial transition experience was filled with a mixture of excitement and nervousness and were concerned with the organisational aspect of starting post-primary school rather than the academic aspect associated with post-primary school. However, the findings saw that student's views changed in 2<sup>nd</sup> year with the introduction of the Junior Cycle CBA's and that fact that the students realised that they were not in 1<sup>st</sup> year anymore. The students indicated that level of supports in their transition primarily came from the Year Head, Class Teacher and fellow students with little help directly from the guidance counsellor. The research showed that the participating students are aware of the role of the guidance counsellor and the services that the guidance counsellors offer yet wanted greater access to these services.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **6.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the main findings based on the research aims that were outlined at the outset of this research. This chapter will also highlight the strengths and limitations which were met during this research. As part of this chapter the impact of the research on future policy and practice will be discussed. In addition, recommendations based on the findings and research literature in this work will also be made. Finally this chapter will conclude with a reflexive summary based around the encounters of this study.

### **6.1 Summary of this Study**

The aim to explore the transition experience of students in two post-primary schools and the role of the guidance counsellor played in the transition. A mixed method approach was applied where student surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with guidance counsellors were conducted in the two participating schools.

The overall research questions of this research project were:

- What are the experiences of second year students in relation to transition from primary to post-primary school with two schools

This research revealed that the initial experience of transition varied with some students experiencing nervous/anxious emotions while other students reported how they were excited at the prospect of transitioning to post-primary school. Students also reflected on the organisational and institutional changes they experienced in their transition. The findings emulate Smyth (2016) where students express a mixture of anxiety and excitement at the initial transition process with academic and social challenges becoming more apparent in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Evidence gathered from students in this research identified the academic demands on them as they progressed into 2<sup>nd</sup> year was noted with a reduction in the student's motivation to do academic work (Smyth 2016) along with the new challenge of the Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments (CBA's).

- What school approaches support students transition from primary school to post-primary school from the perspective of students and the Guidance Counsellor with two schools

In this study, student's viewed the role of the year head, class tutor and fellow peers as significant supports in the transition experience. Previous research indicated that the year head and class tutor are recognised as the most significant supports from a student's perspective (Smyth et al 2004). In

addition, students recognised the key role of the class tutor in a pastoral capacity. Many students reflected on the support of their fellow peers in the transition process as many of the participating students recognised that their peers were also experiencing their own transition experience.

- What role does the Guidance Counsellor play in the transition of students from primary to post-primary school across two schools

Findings from this research identify that students saw the role of the guidance counsellor as one where the guidance counsellor worked mainly with senior cycle students across the two schools. From these findings, the participating students did not place the role of guidance counsellor in their transition. The findings of the student focus groups suggested that the student's wanted more access to the guidance counsellor. In this area previous research by McCoy et al (2006) stated that the provision of guidance counselling services has been inconsistent resulting in a lack of clarity of the role. Previous literature and the study findings, suggest that students in junior cycle and clients in general need to have more clarification on the exact role of the guidance counsellor.

- What school differences emerged in relation to students' experiences of transition from primary to post-primary school from the perspective of students and the Guidance Counsellor?

The transition experiences that emerged between the two participating schools varied in some cases with three main differences emerging from the findings. The first of these differences arose from the findings of students in school 1 settling into school easier than that of their counterparts in school 2. The research identified that induction days and bonding days in school 1 provided to the students aided them in their transition. Darmody (2008) discussed the ability of students to convert their acquired economic and cultural capital in their transition experience. The significance of the school supports roles varied across the two schools with students in school 1 identifying the role of the year head as key importance in their transition with school 2 identifying the class tutor in the same significance. The findings in the research reflect similar views in previous literature as Smyth et al (2004) stated that the year head and the class tutor systems are seen as the most significant in student's transition. The final difference for the students in the participating schools arose in 2<sup>nd</sup> year with reference to role of the Classroom Based Assessments (CBA's). Students in school 1 spoke about the concerns the introduction of the assessments would have on their workload in 2<sup>nd</sup> year as the findings noted that students in school 1 found the workload had increased in 2<sup>nd</sup> year whereas the students in school 2 noticed that the teachers demanded more of them in 2<sup>nd</sup> year.



## **6.2 How this study informed the researchers thinking in the practice of Guidance Counselling**

By applying reflexivity to the research it gave the opportunity to the researcher to reflect on their role on the research and how their background, profession and experiences hold a potential role in their future practice of guidance counselling. On reflection of the findings, the researcher has gained a greater insight into how the students experience their own transition and the role that supports such as teachers, class tutors, parents, school management and guidance counsellors can offer. Looking forward, the researcher will spend more time at the beginning of the school year in helping students settle into post-primary school.

## **6.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

A significant strength in this research was the ability to gain access to 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and guidance counsellors in two schools. The presence of two schools in this research allowed for a greater amount of students to have their views and experiences to be heard. In addition, a key strength was the position of the researcher in the study as they have worked in post-primary education since 2010. Another key strength in this research was the use of a mixed methods approach using surveys, focus groups and semi structured interviews which generated a more in-depth picture in understanding the student's experience. The researcher had a personal interest in the student's views and experience of their transition into post-primary school and the role the guidance counsellor played in the transition. This research aimed to address how 2<sup>nd</sup> year students viewed their transition experience something that previous research would not have done. Furthermore, the research aimed to explore the role played by supports including year heads, class tutors, peers and guidance counsellors. In terms of the participating schools, the findings may provide the guidance counsellor with insights to how the students transitioned into post-primary school. One of the participating schools in this research was also the school in which the researcher teaches in. Based on this point the subjectivity of the researcher can be identified as a limitation in this research (Yin 2009). Therefore, throughout this research the researcher applied a reflexive approach in order to avoid bias occurring in the context of this research.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations for research, policy and practice:

- The role of the guidance counsellor needs to be clarified in more detail for junior cycle students, principals and teachers. Furthermore, how the guidance counsellor, principals and teachers define the role of the guidance counsellor must also be considered. Students in this research were aware of their role with senior cycle students, however, in some cases

students laments at the lack of access to the guidance counsellor. Therefore, a clear definition of the role must be promoted as it is from this clarity the students will develop a greater understanding of the role of the guidance counsellor.

- Evidence in this study shows the positive impact of induction programmes on student's transition in post-primary school. The implementation and roll of transition to post-primary school modules at the beginning of each year in the Junior Cycle by schools could coincide with the roll out of Wellbeing as a short course in the new Junior Cycle programme.

### **6.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter concludes this research on the views and experiences of student's transition and the role of the guidance counsellor across two schools. It provided a summary of the research questions and findings. Furthermore, the strengths and limitations of this research were also outlined. The chapter also provided recommendations based on the research findings and that of the literature in relation to the area of student transition and the role of the guidance counsellor. The researcher's personal learning was also discussed in this chapter.

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## APPENDIX A

### STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET- SURVEY

#### A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS

Date: April 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

Dear Student

As part of my Dissertation Project in the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development at the University of Limerick, I am carrying out a study on student's views and experiences of school transition. This information sheet will tell you what the study is about.

#### **What is the study about?**

The study aims to find out the views and experiences of students transition from primary to post-primary school

#### **What will I have to do?**

Your involvement in the study will be during your timetabled school day- e.g. SPHE class-time. You will be invited to take part in a 40 minute survey questionnaire with some of your classmates. You will be asked to answer questions your views of school transition in 1<sup>st</sup> year and whether transition still exists in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and the supports available to you in your school transition.

#### **What are the benefits?**

The findings of the study might help guidance counsellors, teachers and the school as whole to provide more positive and meaningful programme and supports around student's transition in lower secondary education.

#### **What are the risks?**

You might decide that you do not want to answer a question. If this happens, you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to.

#### **What if I do not want to take part?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to take part or to stop your involvement in this study at any time.

#### **What happens to the information?**

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researchers' computer. The computers are protected with a password. Your name will not appear on any information. You will be assigned a fictitious name when the information is being written in a report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years. After this time, it will be destroyed.

**Who else is taking part?**

Young people aged 13-14 years from your school and one other school in the county will be invited to take part in the study. In your school, I hope that will 30 students take part in the survey questionnaire.

**What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the survey questionnaire, the session will immediately stop and the questionnaires will be taken back up until the researcher and student(s) are ready to restart the session or the session would be stopped completely.

**What happens at the end of the study?**

At the end of the study, the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. No student's name appears in any of the results. Dr. Orla McCormack will store all data gathered from the research securely and safely in her office for 7 years. Orla will store information that is stored on a computer that is password-protected.

**What if I have more questions or do not understand something?**

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

**What happens if I change my mind during the study?**

At any stage should you feel that you want to stop taking part in the study, you are free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

**Contact name and number of Project Investigators.****Principal Investigator**

Dr. Orla McCormack/Liam Guilfoyle  
School of Education, University of Limerick, Tel: 061-202760  
Email: [orla.mccormack@ul.ie](mailto:orla.mccormack@ul.ie)  
[liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie](mailto:liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie)

**Other investigator**

Brid McHugh  
Postgraduate Masters Student  
School of Education  
[16101944@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:16101944@studentmail.ul.ie)

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

---

Dr. Orla McCormack

---

Liam Guilfoyle

---

Brid McHugh

*This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number).*

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee*



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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

## **APPENDIX B**

### **STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET – FOCUS GROUP**

#### **A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

#### **Dear Student**

As part of my Dissertation Project in the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development at the University of Limerick, I am carrying out a study on student's views and experiences of school transition. This information sheet will tell you what the study is about.

#### **What is the study about?**

The study aims to find out the views and experiences of students transition from primary to lower secondary education.

#### **What will I have to do?**

Your involvement in the study will be during your timetabled school day- e.g. SPHE class-time. You will be invited to take part in a 45 minute focus group session with some of your classmates. The focus groups will involve 5-6 students in a group setting being asked questions about how they view their school transition. The focus group will audio-recorded.

#### **What are the benefits?**

The findings of the study might help guidance counsellors, teachers and the school as whole to provide more positive and meaningful programme and supports around student's transition in lower secondary education.

#### **What are the risks?**

You might decide that you do not want to answer a question. If this happens, you do not have to answer any question you do not wish to.

#### **What if I do not want to take part?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose not to take part or to stop your involvement in this study at any time.

#### **What happens to the information?**

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researchers' computer. The computers are protected with a password. Your name will not appear on any information. You will be assigned a fictitious name when the information is being written in a report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years. After this time, it will be destroyed



**Who else is taking part?**

Young people aged 13-14 years from your school and one other school in the county will be invited to take part in the study. In your school, I hope that there will be one focus group from second year. If more than six students from each class volunteer to take part in the study, I will randomly select six students from those who are interested, by drawing random names out of a hat.

**What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the focus group session, the interview session will immediately stop until the researcher and student(s) are ready to restart the session or the session would be stopped completely.

**What happens at the end of the study?**

At the end of the study, the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous. No student's name appears in any of the results. The researcher Dr. Orla McCormack in her office will store all data gathered from the research securely and safely for 7 years. Orla will store information that is stored on a computer that is password-protected.

**What if I have more questions or do not understand something?**

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

**What happens if I change my mind during the study?**

At any stage should you feel that you want to stop taking part in the study, you are free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences for changing your mind about being in the study.

**Contact name and number of Project Investigators.****Principal Investigator**

Dr. Orla McCormack/Liam Guilfoyle  
School of Education, University of Limerick, Tel: 061-202760  
Email: [orla.mccormack@ul.ie](mailto:orla.mccormack@ul.ie)  
[liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie](mailto:liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie)

**Other investigator**

Brid McHugh  
Postgraduate Masters Student  
School of Education  
[16101944@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:16101944@studentmail.ul.ie)

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Orla McCormack

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Liam Guilfoyle

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Brid McHugh

*This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number).*

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:  
Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
EHS Faculty Office University of Limerick, Tel (061) 234101*



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## **APPENDIX C**

### **PARENT INFORMATION SHEET (SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP)**

#### **A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of my Dissertation Project in the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development at the University of Limerick, I am carrying out a study on student's views and experiences of school transition. This information sheet will tell you what the study is about.

#### **What is the study about?**

The study aims to find out the views and experiences of students transition from primary to lower secondary education.

#### **What will your child have to do?**

Your child is invited to participate in the study will be during your timetabled school day- e.g. SPHE class-time. Your child will be invited to take part in a 40 minute survey questionnaire session with some of their classmates. In addition, if your child is willing, they will be invited to participate in a focus group on the same topic.

#### **What are the benefits?**

The findings of the study might help guidance counsellors, teachers and the school as whole to provide more positive and meaningful programme and supports around student's transition in lower secondary education and that of your child as well.

#### **What are the risks?**

Your child might decide that they do not want to answer a question in the survey questionnaire or focus group. If this happens, and your child does not want to answer any question, they do not have to.

#### **What if my child does not want to take part?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and your child can choose not to take part or to stop his/her involvement in this study at any time. Students who do not take part in the study will carry on with their usual class-time activities.

#### **What happens to the information?**

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researchers' computer. The computers are protected with a password. Your child's name will not appear on any information. Your child will be assigned a fictitious name when the information is being written in a report by the researcher. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years. After this time, it will be destroyed.

**Who else is taking part?**

Young people aged 13-14 years from your child's school and one other school in the county will be invited to take part in the study. In your child's school, I hope that there will be 30 students taking part in the survey questionnaire and 6 students in the focus group

**What if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong during the survey questionnaire or the focus group, the session will immediately stop until the researcher and student(s) are ready to restart the session or the session would be stopped completely.

**What happens at the end of the study?**

At the end of the study, the information will be used to present results. The information will be completely anonymous from the questionnaire and your child will receive a fictional name in the focus group. No student's name appears in any of the results. Dr. Orla McCormack will store all data gathered from the research securely and safely in her office for 7 years. Orla will store information on a computer that is password-protected.

**What if my child or I have more questions?**

If you or child has any questions about the study, you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you and your child feel that all your questions have been answered.

**What happens if my child changes their mind during the study?**

At any stage should your child feel that they want to stop taking part in the study, they are free to stop and take no further part. There are no consequences for your child if they change their mind about being in the study.

**Contact name and number of Project Investigators.****Principal Investigator**

Dr. Orla McCormack/Liam Guilfoyle  
School of Education, University of Limerick, Tel: 061-202760  
Email: [orla.mccormack@ul.ie](mailto:orla.mccormack@ul.ie)  
[liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie](mailto:liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie)

**Other investigator**

Brid McHugh  
Postgraduate Masters Student  
School of Education  
16101944@studentmail.ul.ie

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Orla McCormack

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Liam Guilfoyle

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Brid McHugh

*This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number).*

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact: Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics  
EHS Faculty Office, University of Limerick, Tel (061) 23410*



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**APPENDIX D**

**PRINCIPAL LETTER**

**A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND  
THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 5<sup>th</sup> 2018

**EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13**

Dear Principal,

I am a Postgraduate Masters student from the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development Programme at the University of Limerick. As part of my 2<sup>nd</sup> year Dissertation project, I will be researching 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and guidance counsellor's views and experiences of transition from primary to post-primary school. The project aims to develop a greater understanding of how second year students view and experience their transition and the view and experience of the guidance counsellor will be sought as part of this research. I would be grateful if you would consider allowing me to seek consent from students in your school and their parents to allow them to participate in this study.

The pupils' involvement in this project would be during their timetabled school day- e.g. SPHE class-time. The participating pupils would be invited to take part in one forty minute survey questionnaire and one 45-minute focus group sessions with some of their peers. The pupils would be asked to answer some questions on their transition in 1<sup>st</sup> year and whether they are still in transition in 2<sup>nd</sup> year. I hope to recruit one focus group from 2<sup>nd</sup> year in a voluntary capacity. I hope undertake a semi-structured interview with the guidance counsellor. The findings of the study might also help guidance counsellor, teachers and the school as a whole to provide more positive and meaningful understanding of how student's transition in lower secondary education.

While some of the questions asked may be sensitive, the participating pupils would not be required to answer any question they do not wish to. The information they do give would be kept confidential and stored on the researcher's computer with a protection password. The information will be anonymised and kept for a period of seven years, after which it will be deleted and/or disposed of sensitively. The same project is also being carried out in one other school in the county.

Participation in this study would be voluntary and the pupils and/or their parents/carers may chose not to consent or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. Students who do not want to take part will carry on with their normal class time activities. If you have any concerns or questions about the study, please contact me or my project supervisor Dr. Orla McCormack. Please find enclosed information sheets for participants and parents, which explain the exact details of the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Orla McCormack

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Liam Guilfoyle

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Brid McHugh

**Principal Investigator**

Dr. Orla McCormack/Liam Guilfoyle  
School of Education,  
University of Limerick, Tel: 061-202760  
Email: [orla.mccormack@ul.ie](mailto:orla.mccormack@ul.ie)  
[liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie](mailto:liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie)

**Other investigator**

Brid McHugh  
Postgraduate Masters Student  
School of Education  
[16101944@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:16101944@studentmail.ul.ie)

*This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health*

*Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number).*

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:  
Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
EHS Faculty Office  
University of Limerick  
Tel (061) 234101*



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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

**APPENDIX E**

**GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR INFORMATION SHEET**

**A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND  
THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

**EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13**

Dear Guidance Counsellor,

I am a Postgraduate Masters student from the Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development Programme at the University of Limerick. As part of my 2<sup>nd</sup> year Dissertation project, I will be researching 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and guidance counsellor's views and experiences of transition from primary to post-primary school. The project aims to develop a greater understanding of how second year students view and experience their transition and the view and experience of the guidance counsellor will be sought as part of this research. I would be grateful if you would consider allowing me to conduct a semi-structured interview with you for the purpose of this research.

The guidance counsellors' involvement will be a forty-minute semi-structured interview. This semi-structured interview will involve some questions on your role in school setting and your involvement in student's transition in lower secondary education. The findings of the study might also help the guidance counselling department, teachers and the school as a whole to provide more positive and meaningful understanding of how student's transition in lower secondary education.

The information given would be kept confidential and stored on the researcher's computer with a protection password. The information will be anonymised and kept for a period of seven years, after which it will be deleted and/or disposed of sensitively. The same project is also being carried out in one other school in the county.

Participation in this study would be voluntary and the pupils and you may chose not to consent or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. If you have any concerns or questions about the study, please contact me or my project supervisor Dr. Orla McCormack.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Orla McCormack

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Liam Guilfoyle

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Brid McHugh

**Principal Investigator**

Dr. Orla McCormack/Liam Guilfoyle  
School of Education,  
University of Limerick, Tel: 061-202760  
Email: [orla.mccormack@ul.ie](mailto:orla.mccormack@ul.ie)  
[liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie](mailto:liam.guilfoyle@ul.ie)

**Other investigator**

Brid McHugh  
Postgraduate Masters Student  
School of Education  
[16101944@studentmail.ul.ie](mailto:16101944@studentmail.ul.ie)

*This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health*

*Sciences Research Ethics Committee (quote approval number).*

*If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:  
Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
EHS Faculty Office  
University of Limerick  
Tel (061) 234101*



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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT CONSENT-STUDENT

A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT’S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS

Date: April 16<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that what the researchers find out in this study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
- I am fully aware of what I will have to do, and of any risks and benefits of the study.
- I know that I can volunteer to take part in the focus group study if I wish to do so.
- I know that I am choosing to take part in the study and that I can stop taking part in the study at any stage without giving any reason to the researchers.

This study involves audio recording of the focus group sessions. Please tick the appropriate box

- I am aware that the focus groups will be audio recorded and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can ask that the recording equipment be switched off? I know that I can ask for a summary of the focus group session, which will not include anybody’s name. I understand what will happen to the recordings once the study is finished.
- I do not agree to my child being audio recorded in this study.

I agree to the statements above and I consent to taking part in this research study.

Name: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_





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**APPENDIX G**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT- GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR**

**A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT’S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 16<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

**Should you agree to participate in this study please read the statements below and if you agree to them, please sign the consent form.**

- I have read and understood the participant information sheet.
- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that what the researchers find out in this study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written material developed.
- I am fully aware of what I will have to do, and of any risks and benefits of the study.
- I know that I am choosing to take part in the study and that I can stop taking part in the study at any stage without giving any reason to the researchers.

**This study involves audio/video recording. Please tick the appropriate box**

- I am aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (audio) and I agree to this. However, if I feel uncomfortable at any time I can ask that the recording equipment be switched off. I understand that I can ask for a copy of my recording. I understand what will happen to the recordings once the study is finished.
- I do not agree to being audio recorded in this study.

After considering the above statements, I consent to my involvement in this research project.

Name: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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APPENDIX H

CONSENT FORM (PARENT/CARER)

A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS

Date: April 16<sup>th</sup> 2018

EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13

- I have read and understood the parent/carer information sheet.
I understand what the study is about, and what my child's results will be used for.
I understand where the research will be carried out.
I understand that my child's name will not appear on any research data from this study.
I give permission that my child's data can be used anonymously in report format and published output (e.g. journal publication).
I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving my child, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.
I know that my child's participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my child's participation in the study at any stage without giving any reason.

This study involves audio recording. Please tick the appropriate box

- I am aware that my child's participation in this study will be audio recorded and I agree to this. However, should I or my child feel uncomfortable at any time I/my child can ask that the recording equipment be switched off? I am entitled to an anonymised summary of the focus group if I or my child wants to review it. I am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is finished.
I do not agree to my child being audio recorded in this study.

After considering the above statements, I consent to my child \_\_\_\_\_ (name) involvement in this research project.

Name of child: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/carer: (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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**APPENDIX I**

**CONSENT FORM (PRINCIPAL)**

**A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

Date: April 8<sup>th</sup> 2018

**EHS Rec No: 2018\_03\_13**

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and the school will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The survey questionnaire, focus group and semi-structured interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews (surveys) may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Brid McHugh to carry out this research at \_\_\_\_\_ School.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H

## **APPENDIX J**

### **STUDENT SURVEY**

This student survey questionnaire is forming part of research into the  
***A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE  
ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS***

The answers given in this questionnaire will be treated confidentially and anonymity will be maintained.

#### **Introduction**

1. Are you:        Boy                      Girl  
**Transition into 1<sup>st</sup> Year**

2. On your first day of school were you?

Rank in order e.g. 1 being the most relevant to your experience, 10 being the least relevant to your experience)

- Amazed at the size of the school
- Amazed at the increased number of pupils in the school
- Feeling lost – not knowing where to go
- Excited at being in a new school
- Nervous/Anxious at being in a new school
- Looking forward to meeting my new teachers
- Looking forward to trying to new subjects
- Missing your primary school and friends
- Not missing your primary school and friends
- Missing your primary school teacher

3. How long did it take for you to settle into post-primary school life?

- September to October
- October to December
- January to March
- March to May
- Don't know

4. What was the **hardest** part of your transition into post-primary school from primary

- Increase in school-work
- Spending longer time at homework
- Bullying
- Difference in the size of the textbooks from primary school
- New teachers
- New subjects
- Moving to a larger school
- Length of the school day
- Family support
- New peer groups
- Organisation of lockers, books, resources and timetable
- Other: (please name) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Would be beneficial for 1st years to return to their primary schools and speak to 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils about their concerns, fears, hopes on the transition to post-primary school

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither agree or disagree      Disagree      Strongly  
Disagree      No opinion

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which **school support** helped you the most to settle into school life? (Rank Top 3 - 1,2,3)

- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- Year Head
- Assistant Year Head
- Class Teacher
- Subject Teacher
- Guidance Counsellor
- Chaplain
- Student Council
- Fellow Student
- Home School Liaison Officer
- Other: (please name) \_\_\_\_\_

## Transition into 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

### ➤ Academic

7. If you were to identify **one** academic difference between 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year, what would that difference be?

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8. Do you take part in **extra-curricular activities** in school? (E.G. Sports, Student Council, Clubs and Societies, Committees)

Yes No

If answered 'Yes', provide an example of that extra-curricular activity:

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9. How **motivated** are you to do academic work in 2<sup>nd</sup> year than what you were in 1<sup>st</sup> year?

Very little A little Somewhat A lot A very great deal

No opinion

Other: (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. I have considered the fact by this time next year I will be 3 months away from sitting the **Junior Certificate/Cycle Examination**

Very little A little Somewhat A lot A very great deal No

opinion

Other: (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

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### ➤ Social Relationships – Peers

11. In 2<sup>nd</sup> year my circle of friends changed from the circle of friends you had in 1<sup>st</sup> year?

Very little A little Somewhat A lot A very great deal No

opinion

Other: (please

specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### ➤ School Supports

12. What **supports** do you think the school and teachers currently provide for 2<sup>nd</sup> year students

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13. What could the **school** as a whole do more to support your school transition?

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14. What could your **teachers** do more to support your school transition?

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➤ **Guidance Counsellor**

15. What do you think the **guidance counsellor** has done well in helping students transition from primary to post-primary school?

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16. What do you think the **guidance counsellor** could do to help students who are still in transition?

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➤ **Other**

17. Is there anything in relation to **your own school transition** that you would like to highlight as part of this survey?

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**APPENDIX K**

**STUDENT FOCUS GROUP**

This student focus group is forming part of research into the

**A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND  
THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

The answers given in this focus group will be treated confidentially and anonymity will be maintained.

**Themes to apply to the Focus Group**

**1. General Experiences of School**

- What secondary school was going to be like?
- Things liked best about the secondary school?
- Things that are difficult about secondary school?

**2. Indicators**

- Role school transition plays on academic performance,
- Role school transition plays on social relationships
- Role school transition pays on the personal and emotional being

**3. School Supports**

- Socio-economic backdrop of the school
- Existing supports available
- Role of Guidance Counsellor

**4. Additional supports the school could provide**

- Supports would students like to see in 2<sup>nd</sup> year that may only be available in 1<sup>st</sup> year?





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## **APPENDIX L**

### **SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR**

This semi-structured interview is forming part of research into the

#### **A STUDY OF THE VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT'S TRNASITION AND THE ROLE OF THE GUIDACNE COUNSELLOR WITH TWO SCHOOLS**

The answers given in this semi-structured interview will be treated confidentially and anonymity will be maintained.

#### **Introduction**

- Tell me about yourself
- How did you become a Guidance Counsellor
- Describe your role as a Guidance Counsellor

#### **School**

- Describe the school in relation to number of students, ethos and priorities

#### **Student Experience**

- What difficulties do you think students experience when transitioning in your school
- What supports if any, does the school have to support students? With particular reference in terms of first year/second year
- How does the particular school environment support/challenge students transition

#### **Guidance Counsellor**

- The exact role of the guidance counsellor in the transition process of the student
- Can extra supports be implemented to aid the transition of students in school